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A COINCIDENCE OF CULTURES
Cultural dialogue: Problems and prospects

Mevlut Ceylan

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ABSTRACT

In writing this thesis I decided to move from the general to the particular, beginning with various definitions of poetry and the roles it has played in society at different times in history. I describe how, latterly, it impinged on my own life as a response to certain existential challenges in the environment in which I grew up. This made for an antipathetic atmosphere ruled by philistines whose values—propagated through a deliberately distorted education system and a supine media—and the effects of that atmosphere had to be negated before Turkish society could move on to a different level of self-awareness.

So much for theory, which I explore in some detail in first chapter. From theory I move onto practice, specifically my own experience, whilst seeking to avoid the seductions of an ego trip. To this end I selected three of my published works, which had received critical acclaim in significant quarters. These are succeeded by the two fields of activity that have absorbed the most part of my energies, namely translation and anthologisation. Both these activities entail an almost insupportable responsibility. Have I captured the meaning correctly whilst overcoming the linguistic barrier that might impede the translation of the meaning? Would the author be satisfied or dissatisfied with what I have done? Similarly, anthologisation activity bristles with challenges no less formidable, albeit of a somewhat different nature. These were the same challenges as confronted Palgrave when compiling the most famous of all English poetry anthologies, *The Golden Treasury*. How to choose a poem that relates to a time and reflects the preoccupations as well as the fashion of that time? How to select poems that exemplify a movement in the way that *Lyrical Ballads* did for the Romantic generation, turning its back on heroic couplets and the artifices of an artificial society, so the individual may relate once more to nature as the primary source of poetic inspiration. This has echoes, no matter how remote, of Turkish literature when people abandoned Divan poetry for modernisation, largely under imported (especially French) influences. In doing this I settle for a definition of Turkishness in its broader sense, that is, Rumelian Turkey as well as Anatolian Turkey.

Some of the issues affect and afflict present-day Turkey. Our country stands at a crossroads in its history. This has impacted on my life here in London, where I had sought safety in exile. I learned from bitter experience what William Empson meant when he referred to his life as a university lecturer in Japan as ‘the same war on a different foot’. My experience differs only in terms of location. I was working in an extraterritorial branch of Turkish academy, and the problem with this is that the Ottomans inherited more than a city when they conquered Constantinople; they inherited the tradition of Byzantine intrigue. I promptly became a victim, and am only now beginning to recover, with a bruised ego.

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Acknowledgements

When first it occurred to me to commit to writing some of the more memorable of my experiences as an expatriate Turk in Europe, neither a *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) nor a Turkish Cypriot tycoon but a down-at-heels bohemian, I thought that these experiences, of little interest to anyone but myself, would hardly be sufficient to fill a pamphlet, much less a thesis. As I persisted, I began to see it as an episode in an ongoing dialogue between Europe and the Ottomans in its positive aspects as much as in its negative ones. If the British Admiral Collingwood, who launched the British fleet in the Mediterranean against the Turkish navy at Navarino Bay in 1826 without the permission of the Admiralty in London and somehow escaped court martial, is an instance of the latter, the assault on Nice in 1543 by the combined French and Turkish fleets is a case of the former (Woodhouse, 1965).

Always a 'positivist', I opted to contribute to Euro-Turkish relations through dialogue between cultures with what skills I had; an affirmative approach rather than the adversarial one beloved of 'mass media' sensationalism, myopic caricature and superficial understanding of complex issues that can only be described, in my moments of frustration, as tunnel vision of the culturally impaired.

I embarked on what was for me an odyssey that culminated in my appointment as Director of the Yunus Emre Institute, London, which led to my writing up this critical engagement with cultural dialogue, and which started out by comparing my own insignificance with the magnitude of the Turko-Ottoman heritage.

Odysseus on his adventures was helped by many but showed gratitude to few, even Dido. In my own odyssey I cannot fail to acknowledge the generous help accorded me from various quarters, academic and non-academic: my supervisor, Dr Kate Maguire, whose intervention time and again saved the frail vessel of my research from shipwreck. She achieved this by pointing out in response to my question, what does a poet have to say, that I had more to say than I was saying, giving me ideas of how to position my work within a wider discourse besides other revelations that came out of close dialogue with each other, always accompanied by unfailing good humour and tolerance of my efforts. The staff at the British Library and SOAS library were likewise generous with their time and expertise. For unflagging encouragement whenever I languished and yielded to despair (the

occupational hazard of the practitioner of verse), my thanks go to Dr Tunc Aybak, whose talks and experience in the field of cultural diplomacy have contributed to successful events at the Cultural Centre whilst we worked to engage people from other cultures to share ours. My dialogues with both practitioners and critics of the art of poetry benefited me more than words can express. If I have inadvertently omitted anyone whose name should have figured here, I apologise unreservedly and undertake to make amends in the event of the text finding its way into print.

Introduction

This work chronicles a process of critical engagement with a number of activities and commitments. Through this process I have been able to make explicit the learning that I both extracted from, and applied to, each of the phases of my professional career. These phases have included teaching, journalism and my years in the civil service. They all have links to each other, more through my professional attitude and love of translation in its broadest form than through any functional link. However, what has been at the centre of my life, informing everything I do and the way I have approached myself and others, is poetry. This contextual statement therefore tells the story of the part poetry has played in my life and, I hope, how I have worked to bring notions of poetry, metaphorisation and translation into the lives of others.

The themes of learning that have emerged are poetica, challenges met in translation, the political and cultural impact of translation activity, and the importance of leadership in matters affecting culture. I explore these themes through my involvement in four public roles and functions—my authorship, anthologisation, translation and latterly, directorship of the Yunus Emre Cultural Centre in London.

Unlike the poet Mehmet Akif who, despite being the author of the Turkish National Anthem, was obliged to flee Turkey and sought political asylum in Egypt. I chose Europe and specifically London as the sphere of my operation. Central to my motivation in making an existential choice, crucial in respect of my future literary development and ambitions, was the role I envisaged for myself as a cultural bridge between East and West in my capacity as translator, for which I saw myself best fitted. Important in the decision to imitate the Prophet, in my own personal *hijrah*, was the need to get away from falsehood, which the Prophet achieved by challenging the commercial oligarchy of Mekkah with its unfairly hierarchised society based on worship of idols; similarly, I tacitly challenge presuppositions of philistine military rule in negating those essential humanist values I wanted to espouse in a more tolerant environment, where the voice of a dissident could be heard rather than silenced.

Positioning Myself: The Context of My Work

Before taking up my current position as Director of the Turkish Cultural Centre in London I worked as a civil servant, a journalist and a teacher. However, my greatest interest and, indeed, my lifelong passion is literature, and poetry in particular. Poetry not only builds a cultural bridge between myself and my audience but has been my therapy. Literature, poetry and also translation have played an important part in my intellectual development, not least insofar as they have acted as vehicles for and expressions of my values.

All of the professional roles I have held have contributed to my development and added different and new knowledge to my lexicon of selfhood. Teaching and, to some degree, journalism has developed my skills in coping with events and people, understanding them, and passing on that understanding to students and to the public. My work in these fields has also allowed me to commit myself and my time to others, an urge to philanthropy being an aspect of my character and motivation that has informed many of the life-choices I have made.

Born Turkish, I belong to a generation influenced by the 1960s era of 'Make love, not war,' a global counter-culture, perhaps the greatest and certainly the most international grassroots movement on record, in its effort to plant the seed of peace and celebration from China to Peru. Thus my generation found itself in the middle of a struggle for change. At the time my values were still in the course of development, but this era raised a number of conflicts for me which, over time, I have been able to look at through a different lens. I realised later, for example, that this movement was, like any other, open to manipulation by supporters and representatives of the interests and ideological positioning of the USA and Western Europe at government level. Yet this movement also stimulated protests against the status quo in those countries. For a young man at the crossroads of East and West in a culture trying to recover some certainty about its identity, and myself being at the crossroads of my adult identity, this was a challenging time that I realise influenced my intellectual development through the power of words.

This hippy movement was both sincere and yet superficial and, to someone from a more traditional culture, was both seductive and deeply confusing, and it was this that reinforced my interest in how society functions and in politics.

This interest led me to choose Social Sciences as a degree course. It was a personal choice that helps explain the reason for the pleasure I took in my studies. For my first degree I did a part-time course that took five years to complete. I think this in itself shows my commitment at that time to improving my intellectual skills, something that has stayed with me ever since.

My earliest thoughts on social matters, particularly the relationship between East and West and dominant cultural paradigms, relate also to the study of history at school. The forces of nationalism – Bulgarian, Bosnian, Armenian and Kurdish, for example – helped precipitate the decline of the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century (Arab political, rather than religio-cultural, nationalism was a phenomenon of the twentieth century). Nationalist ideas were derived from European thought and cultures, and coincided with the Industrial Revolution then taking root in Europe. These factors led to the erosion of certain Turkish cultural and social values, tantamount to an assault on the Turkish identity. One example is the introduction of the fez, displacing the traditional Ottoman turban: although Arab and not European (originating in Morocco, it was adopted through Britain's close relationship with Egypt at that time), it became a symbol of European influence in Turkey, whilst in the European media it was useful in projecting a certain image of the Turk by way of ridicule. Orientalism is how the West has seen the East for centuries. Edward Said, the Palestinian public intellectual, has probably produced the most eloquent and informed work on this powerful concept of orientalism:

The Orient has helped define Europe (or the West), as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. (Said, 1995: 1–2)

As in the era of the Crusades, when the Muslim was stereotyped as the eternal antagonist, seen as 'the Other' to be invaded, occupied and subjugated, Muslims continued through the centuries to be perceived by the Christian West not only as the Other but the inferior Other. This inferiority then invited occupation and colonisation. Colonisation is not just physical and geographical but spiritual and cultural, achieved through the imposition of the Western

Weltanschauung (world view), vehicles being institutions such as the American universities of Beirut and Cairo or Robert College (in Istanbul). Modern Turkey is the outcome of colonial forces that had interests in military strategic positioning, linked to economic interests and access to natural resources such as oil. Such educational institutions in Turkey and the Middle East, and those in the West, encouraged Turkish students with scholarships to produce graduates acceptable to the West, their task being to forge a Western-facing ruling élite:

The very designation of something as Oriental involved an already pronounced evaluative judgment, and in the case of the peoples inhabiting the decayed Ottoman Empire, an implicit programme of action. (ibid: 207)

In the face of such external pressures, as a Turk I have always felt the importance of keeping alive certain mannerisms, concepts and ideals that might be lost without some form of conscious preservation or defence. Words seemed to me a powerful weapon with which to begin this process, which I saw as a kind of cultural counter-revolution. Noam Chomsky writes:

Language embodies the world view of a culture and is unique to the culture that created it. It reflects values and concepts that are deemed to be the most important by a culture. A language describes the culture it comes from. (Chomsky, 1965: in Maynard, 2012: 67)

I witnessed many atrocities and injustices in Turkey in the late 1970s. At the time, the newspaper headline ‘1970 ’lerin Türkiye’si, nasıldı?’, 2010 (‘1970s Turkey: What has happened?’) captured the situation at a time of existential crisis as the country, confronting an uncertain future, struggled to regain its identity. In consequence I know that ideas can, through words, result in people’s destruction; in Turkey, killings took place on a daily basis. J.E. Joseph quotes Aristotle precisely to this effect:

Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal... Now, that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech. (*Politics*, I: 2, Aristotle, 1885, in Joseph 2006)

Whilst Malik bin Nabi (1905–73), the famous Algerian philosopher and author of *The Problem of Ideas in the Islamic World* (2011), was undoubtedly correct in saying that history shows that in the end it is the weight of ideas that counts, not the weight of armaments, ideas can sometimes entail fatal consequences for the person who entertains them. Take, for example, ‘thought crimes’ in the Soviet Union or, in Britain, conscientious objectors, pacifists and ‘defeatists’ who, particularly in the First World War, could be imprisoned for holding such views and, if a conscripted soldier, shot for desertion. In the USA it was similar, as in the case of poet Robert Lowell who was imprisoned (Hamilton, 1983). Thinking back, I can say with certainty that this climate of conflict and killing is the reason I turned to poetry to express my anger at injustices against me and my contemporaries.

If Shelley is correct in calling poets ‘the unacknowledged legislators of mankind’ (Bien, 2007), this raises the questions: unacknowledged by whom and, more importantly, acknowledged by whom? The answer to the second question is that this can only be by posterity, which means that, notwithstanding official persecution or neglect, poets do perform a positive role, even if only posthumously, as keepers of the public conscience.

In my primary school years, two poets taught me to express my thoughts through metaphor. Both belonged to different ideological camps: Islamic conservative and communist. They were Necip Fazıl, a philosopher and poet, and Nazım Hikmet, who spent most of his life in prison and died in exile.

Here a man finds
The tedium of empty days,
Suddenly a bell rings
Sharper than the knell of death

(‘Railway Station’ extract, Necip Fazıl, *Anguish*, 2012)

There descended a voice from the realms lost:
‘This man shall drag the void along his nape!’
Suddenly the roof overhead was tossed
The day a crack left the heavens agape.

All hell broke loose, I saw from my window;
It came true: the old witches’ augury:

Eternal life a gauze on his arrow,
The hunter of the skies took aim at me.

It burnt my life's gem at once to ashes
When I felt the arrow's flaming venom;
Grappling with death as in headlong crashes,
My inmost mouth spewed out my cranium.

Like a tiny teapot, the world convulsed,
Bearings burned out, void lay helter-skelter,
Fact and fantasy alike were repulsed,
Wisdom and folly went out of kilter.

A sledge beat on the anvil of my head;
Into my bed, my last resort, I curled.
A speckled hen, as the aurora bled,
Made a gift to me of a brave new world.
This is an odd world that baffles the sage
Where place is surface and time illusion.
The universe builds us a fleeting stage
Where mankind is duped into delusion.

What are you? Even if you're real, go away.
Hurry, blindness; rush, false eye, come over.
Let your shapes settle in my soul and stay,
My land and master, my friend and lover.

(‘Allegro’, Necip Fazil, *ibid.*)

Today is Sunday.
For the first time they took me out into sun today
And for the first time in my life I was aghast
That the sky is so far away
And so blue
And so vast
I stood there without a motion.

Then I sat on the ground in respectful devotion
Leaning against the white wall.
Who cares about the waves with which I yearn to roll
Or about strife or freedom or my wife right now.
The soil, the sun and me...
I feel joyful and how.

(‘Today is Sunday’, Nazım Hikmet, ed. & trans. Talat Halman, 1982: 314)

I was in my final year of high school when my first poem, entitled ‘Love’, was published in one of the leading literary journals (*Edebiyat*).

The listening heart
your applause is a long silence
The listening heart
in the sayings of the night
Your lips are sand-dry
and distances obstinate
The heart is a fountain
thirsting for a bird

(‘Love’, Mevlut Ceylan, *Seasons from other Seeds*, 2011c)

As a teenager, I was elated to see my name up there among the established writers of the country. Both my favourite poets wrote in beautiful metaphors, however the subject matter, style and references clearly indicate to a Turkish reader the different ideological positioning. For example, Fazıl writes in a mystical Islamic style and Hikmet captures the poetry of everyday life.

But in coming thus to poetry as a teenager, with a teenager’s conviction that I knew it all, I believed that poetry was a way of life. By reading Eastern and Western classical authors I started building a kind of Great Wall around myself. Thus poetry became a central, as well as a refuge, point in my daily activities.

Death
you are a game
I play at nights

I lead you into day
like a child
so let us respect each other

(‘Game’, Mevlut Ceylan, *ibid.*)

The same year *Varlik*, another leading literary journal, cited my work as having equal merit with that of other poets included in the review, praise all the higher for the fact that I was so much younger. During my time at high school my poems and reviews were published in the school’s *Wall Gazette*, produced by the school’s literature department. As one of a group of writers, I edited a literary journal in 1979. In the same year I was also on the editorial board of a journal entitled *Yabanabad*, a regional cultural magazine published in Ankara with essays, political features and arts pages and a journal for talented young writers excluded from the pages of mainstream publications. Since 1979, when I moved to London, I have contributed regularly to literary journals in Turkey and have had my work published in literary journals in London, Paris and Johannesburg. That early work in the 1970s could be described as a journey from the romantic to the politically romantic, best understood as a witness of social injustice but with optimism for change to a more just society where beauty of the soul resides.

You have come to desolate mountains
with hair ineffably flowing into earth
you have brought your yearnings with you
like a bit between your teeth
your breath alive with the fire
of a steed
You have come at the appointed time my love

(‘The Appointed Time’, Mevlut Ceylan, *ibid.*)

Poetry gave me a sense of identity that influenced my personality and perhaps resulted in delays in the completion of some routine duties in my daily life. For instance, I took longer than most to complete my higher education. With poetry I created a world of which I was

the sole denizen—to some extent a mechanism enabling me to survive in a world I perceived as hostile, seeing myself as one of Shelley’s ‘unacknowledged legislators’. This world was one in which words protected me from more direct engagement with the messy world of conflict and killing. However, I soon realised that the language of economics is not always compatible with the language of feelings.

It is one of the purposes of such a critique of my own works, as this is, to confirm or not the belief I have always had, that it is a poet’s duty to reflect their society’s and their era’s struggles and aspirations, which in a sense can become a single entity. Since there is no essential difference between his situation and that of the society which he forms part, such poetic discourse is captured well by Easthope (1983: 20):

Discourse, in Saussure’s phrase, is a social *fact* and also a *social* fact: linguistic determination simultaneously involves ideological determination. Eliot’s conclusion that the ‘monuments form an ideal order amongst themselves’ is correct in affirming the self-consistency of a poetic discourse. But it is mistaken to conceive this autonomy as ideal, transcendental and absolute rather than material, historical and relative.

Poets are short-storytellers and therefore prone to ‘tell’ happenings briefly. When I wrote the following lines in 1989, what I had in mind was to make others aware of what was happening outside their comfortable living-rooms, watching the latest news report. This was something that had influenced my own writings and kept me grounded in reality, whilst on the other hand as a member of society I see:

They always tell me
I will be given a door to open
But I have found myself hanging
 in many mirrors
Justice here is unanimous like death
It is very much admired by tourists
 who come in their thousands
To collect their terminal decorations

(Mevlut Ceylan, 1989)

If one ends up believing that poetry is an ascetic art form, then perhaps ‘Poetry makes nothing happen’ (W.H. Auden). Auden was a left-wing activist, and he wanted to make things happen. He was not an ascetic. The utterance that I have quoted is, I believe, a statement less of asceticism than of disillusionment, if not despair. It comes from a deservedly famous poem entitled ‘The Death of W.B. Yeats’. The same line reappears in a later version, and he obviously thought it worth retaining as part of a complex message about poetry and the poet. Of course Auden was wrong, as he himself tacitly acknowledged by continuing to write from a left-wing perspective, which may have been more instrumental in the promotion of his political ideas than his rather more feeble intervention in the Spanish Civil War as an ambulance driver, which arguably achieved nothing very significant. This raises issues concerning the relationship between words and action. If Eliot were sincere in claiming a Fascist could not write a good poem, a position contradicted by both his own theory and practice, for instance his role in awarding the Bollingen Prize to Pound for *The Pisan Cantos*, then the same criterion could perhaps apply with no less force to the case of Pablo Neruda. According to Greg Dawes, the apparent failure of communism does not, for reasons he elaborates at some length, negate the intrinsic value of Neruda’s work given that the targets of his attack—capitalists (e.g. the plight of the toiling masses, horrors and benefits of capitalist ‘progress’), remain irrespective of recent history:

Neruda’s work merits recognition and praise for his prodigious talent as a crafter of verses and for his ability to make concrete in his poetry the sociohistorical, political circumstances and ethos of his day. (Dawes, 2006: 13)

Indicating, however, through use of the caveat ‘his’, that history may have rendered his views obsolete without affecting his poetic achievement, this leaves unanswered the question posed by Keats at the end of the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ of the relations between truth and beauty, beauty here being both physical (sculpture) and verbal (language).

Words are powerful in so many ways. Much depends on how words are used to express a variety of observations and feelings, social and political commentary, awe at natural beauty and horror at humankind’s capacity for inhumanity at so many levels.

If the state has ‘relative independence’ and law both relates (*sic*) to society and operates (*sic*) as an ‘internally coherent expression’ as law, then poetry also can be seen as fulfilling a double obligation—to its

historical position and to its own ‘nature’ as poetry. In the emphasis given to Engels’s ideas in the reworking of them by the French Marxist Louis Althusser, poetry would be a specific instance of ideological *practice*, defined by its relative autonomy. (*ibid.*)

As mentioned earlier, words can also carry cultural memes and therefore their translation and interpretation become an art form. In my view, the poet and the translator sit well together. I am what is termed bilingual. This term in itself deserves a longer discourse. I may consider myself bilingual in a technical sense, but it is through moving backwards and forward between diverse languages and cultures that I have become culturally bilingual. In my opinion there exists an organic relationship between translation activity and culture, insofar as the translator uses language to translate—in the sense alluded to hereafter of the literal meaning of moving something from one place to another—cultural values and ideas from one culture context to another, perhaps completely different, inconceivable even alien ones. In respect of terms of reference comprehensible in one culture but incomprehensible or nearly so in another, what Leppihalme (1997: ix) has to say is relevant:

The translation of allusions thus involves two language cultures as well as literary and pragmatic aspects on the textual level. Allusions have meaning in the culture or subculture in which they arise but not necessarily in others.

Arabic and Persian poetry were already known to Anglophone audiences, which spurred the founding of another small magazine that would open its pages to modern and contemporary writers in Turkish still unknown in the west, with the exception perhaps of fiction, and in poetry Nazim Hikmet. My colleague and fellow poet Feyyaz Fergar and I appointed ourselves joint editors with this policy in mind, founding *Core* in 1987. It was our intention, as we wrote in the first editorial, that the magazine would be the vehicle for an international poetry forum in words that remain as relevant now as in 1987:

The house of verse should always open its doors to new windows. Poetry cannot live in solitary confinement. It needs from time to time to renew, to restore its topsoil. Therefore cross-pollination is not something to be ostracised. (*Core*, 1 June 1987: 1)

This is why translation is of such great importance; it is a vehicle of cultural cross-pollination through which differences could be respected and universals shared in a way

that journalism with its vested interests cannot achieve. I have translated work from both classical and modern poets, and published anthologies and chapbooks by individual Turkish poets. I have also translated from English into Turkish, including works of the poets from the Asian subcontinent, from Africa, Afro-America, Andalusia and also some classical Arab poets.

‘If we spoke a different language, we would perceive a somewhat different world’ (Ludwig Wittgenstein). Such proverbial emphasis on language at least opened up different colours for me to use in my linguistic tapestry. Even having access to a single language as a foreign tongue is enough, in my opinion, to broaden or expand one’s horizons and contribute to the experience of an enriched world of diverse imagery.

The acquisition of a second language is a lifelong process. For me there is always a slight hesitancy in using and understanding it fully. My approach was first to develop a concrete view of English as my adopted language, to facilitate my ease in using it.

I believe that a critique of my translation activities may reveal different aspects of practical translation tasks as well as a theoretical approach to the topic. For example, translators are usually more successful when the language they translate into their mother tongue is a reflection of their primary culture(s), but this also may lead to original meanings being lost during the transposition. Hanna (2008) stresses this point well in his pithy observation of ‘lost in translation’:

European cultures traditionally make a firm distinction between emotional and intellectual activities, attaching them to the heart and the head respectively. In traditional Chinese culture, I understand, no such distinction is made, since the heart is referred to as the location of mental activities of all kinds. Take these sentences from Herman Melville: ‘I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head. I had rather be a fool with a heart than Jupiter Olympus with a head’ stressed the point of what is ‘lost in translation’. (Bloom, 2009)

Poetry and translation are too important to be merely deposited in books, which people may or may not read. If knowledge exchange is to be successful, in addition to poetry it requires a form of abode that welcomes people to enter, such as the tradition of welcoming strangers to share in a meal round a fire in the universally recognised law of hospitality.

The exchanges that can take place in such an environment have been written about in plays many times. This is why the Cultural Centre of which I am presently Director is important to me not just professionally, but personally. As playwright Thornton Wilder indicated, theatre is a shared platform for all cultural activities:

I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being. (O'Toole, 2014)

The institutes and cultural centres presently being established all over the world are named after the famous Turkish poet, Yunus Emre, who lived in the thirteenth century. Yunus Emre Centres offer not only Turkish language and art courses, painting and photography exhibitions, but also scientific and cultural events such as conferences and seminars.

The appeal of Yunus Emre's poetry resides in part in how easily it lends itself to singing, which accounts for the dissemination of his fame. He wrote in a way that had great appeal to ordinary people. In some ways, naming the Centres for him is an indication of the core values embedded somewhere, perhaps in hidden corners, in Turkish identity. Yunus Emre was the people's poet. This is not unlike the appeal of the Scottish poet, Robert Burns, who used the language of common speech in a way that imparts strength to deep emotions, bypassing the intellect. No other Turkish poet, least of all the court poets with their affected use of language, approaches him in this regard. Then there is the importance of the content: divine love, humanity and folk wisdom. He speaks for all Turks in the same way that Burns speaks for all Scots, appealing to the heart and writing about the everyday things in life.

My role at the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre in London is to introduce the Turkish way of life to people of other cultures, informing and bridge-building, trusting that this 'theatre' will create a more enlightened understanding of diverse cultures.

Through this Centre, our poets, our history, our cultural artefacts and styles can come to life. Through this encounter, both the 'romantic' and the misguided orientalist views of Turkey are challenged and a door opened to reveal the complex culture that has been an empire and a country at the crossroads between East and West, and the East and the Far East, a liminal space for those fleeing political change and various persecutions for hundreds of years. This has given rise to a culture of great richness, as it has both absorbed

and rejected elements from the cultures of others as the Turks have swept in various forms across the Bosphorus to rest for a time, or permanently, on its ancient shores and hinterlands. Its cultural capital, Istanbul, is a metropolis of many languages and histories, ancient and modern, where translation and poetry are part of everyday existence and its identity. It is indeed a most remarkable theatre, and at the Yunus Emre Centre in London we try to offer a glimpse of the riches of our country whilst opening our doors to the riches of others.

Turkish Literature under Threat

Since the inception of the Tanzimat (the reorganisation of the Ottoman Empire along European lines) associated with the reforming sultan, Mahmud II (r. 1828–39), Turkey has been subjected to intermittent massive doses of modernisation, culminating in the proclamation of a secular republic in 1924. From this point the pace of Westernisation accelerated at a steadier pace, having been adopted by the political system. All this is inevitably reflected in successive literary fashions. The post-Tanzimat era, commencing in 1839, coincided with the era of French supremacy in the cultural sphere, enduring for most of the nineteenth century and a substantial part of the twentieth. Thus it is hardly surprising that French impact on Turkish cultural life was considerable. The impact of French movements on the course of development of Turkish letters in the twentieth century was decisive. However, modernism belatedly got underway in Turkey, post-World War I. Turkey picked up trends that by this time were already over in France and Europe—fashions like Dadaism and Surrealism. Their exponents were four Turkish poets, Cemal Sureya, Ilhan Berk, Edip Cansever and Turgut Uyar, who gave these movements a fresh lease of life in Turkey, pointing unconsciously to a phenomenon typical of Third World literature generally: inevitably he who copies must always take second place. Halman (2007: 101) stresses the impact on Turkish letters of social and cultural dislocation through uncritical enthusiasm for foreign models:

The total achievement of Turkish literature from the early 1920s onward is impressive in terms of quality, purpose, continuity and change, originality, and impact. Its prospects for a more significant thrust have been frustrated, or at least slowed down, by numerous factors: the cultural dislocation caused by cataclysmic changes in socio-political institutions, faith and technology; the vast (broader than any other nation) transformation of language; the traditional *lacunae* of criticism,

systematic mythology, psychological analysis, norms of tragedy; the excessive eagerness to imitate or copy foreign (Western) literary models usually from ten to thirty years later; and the lack of a highly creative intellectual climate (no significant philosophy, aesthetics, science evolved in modern Turkey to compare with the level of international accomplishments. (2007: 101)

Their work testifies to a monumental, if seldom acknowledged, inferiority complex marking their output as essentially colonial, exactly like other colonial literatures such as the Canadian, the Australian and the Anglo-Indian, that is to say imitative and derivative. French influence was supreme, visible in the need felt by literary groups to issue a manifesto proclaiming in each case the advent of a literary millennium rejecting the old ways. In 1928 the Ottoman script in which Ottoman literature was written was Latinised, that is, changed to Latin script, thereby closing off communication with the past. This had huge significance. Turkey was moving forward without a basis in the past. It is no wonder that Turkey to this day is struggling with what constitutes its identity. The most influential of these literary millennium publications was *Garip*, a word that can mean both ‘strange’ and ‘a stranger’ (i.e. foreigner), with perhaps deliberate ambiguity. The signatories to this manifesto, Orhan Veli (1914–50), Melih Cevdet (1915–2002) and Oktay Rifat (1914–88), the Turkish poets who together founded the *Garip* movement, were unanimous in rejecting the past, the classical tradition of Ottoman letters known as Diwan poetry. Their work introduced not only the vocabulary but the rhythms of common speech, at the same time addressing a very different audience from that of Ottoman court poets whose work by now had become clichéd. Although Surrealism was on the verge of extinction on the Continent, where fad succeeded fad, when *Garip* appeared on the literary horizon in 1941 the dominant foreign influence was evident from an introduction modelled on André Breton’s *Manifeste du Surréalisme*, which, no differently from its model, employs Marxist criteria of analysis of both style and content, original only in being applied for the first time to Turkish literature. To confirm the preponderant foreign influence it suffices to note that, of fifteen French poets cited by Halman (2007: 346) as examples of Orhan Veli’s skill as a translator, there is not one who is not French. Such observation applies with equal force to the same author’s prose, whether fiction or drama.

In Turkey, the conventions of Diwan poetry were more deeply entrenched and embedded in the profoundly conservative nature of Ottoman society with conventions that applied across most of the cultural spectrum—certainly music and poetry, less in the case of

architecture and fine arts—where European influence was already visible in the eighteenth century. Confronted with this assault, especially after the proclamation of a Republic and without a court to protect it, Diwan poetry retreated to the universities where, until its recent partial revival, it survived as an object of scholarly attention.

Modernism does not always extend to content. A poet like Necip Fazıl uses modern techniques to denigrate Western ideas, but turns to Turkey's past to evoke in his work the image of a lost greatness: the content is mystical and religious. Writing of Fazıl's generation attests to the influence of such legendary European figures as Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé and Rimbaud, and Nobel Prize winner Pablo Neruda whose *oeuvre* appealed to a generation disillusioned with Turkish politics and in revolt against not just the past, but a US-dominated present. The first exponent of the vehicle in which they chose to express these dangerous sentiments, namely *vers libre*, was again Nazım Hikmet. It is seldom that the adoption of a new literary fashion can be dated with such precision as attends the birth of Turkish *vers libre*, used for the first time in the Turkish language in the summer of 1921 when Hikmet wrote 'The Pupils of the Eyes of Hungry People' expressing his indignation at the plight of the Turkish poor:

Sad Freedom
You squander the gleam of your eyes
And the sparkling toil of your hands
To knead dough for countless loaves of bread
Which they won't even let you taste.
All this great freedom is yours to slave for others,
To turn into Croesus those who suck your blood!
You are free.

('The Pupils of the Eyes of Hungry People', Nazım Hikmet, ed. & trans. Talat Halman, /1982)

By contrast, Sezai Karakoç (1930), writer, thinker and poet, has a 67-line poem in which the violent images and fractured syntax of Hikmet convey, in places with a terrible violence, the tortured longings of a man in love:

The sea sucks at the calm luminosity of your heart
And lies burning in the white darkness
On the iodine-smelling playground of loneliness
I am something of a fairy-tale at that moment
A spasm of fever that comes and goes

(‘Tinder Light’, Sezai Karakoç, ed. & trans. Nermin Menemencioğlu, 1978: 378)

This shows how innovative techniques can be put to uses other than those the innovator intended. From different generations, Hikmet (b.1902) and Karakoç (b.1933), two writers poles apart in almost every sense, betray the same kind of influences. Karakoc, likewise under the spell of French literature, has translated the works of several French poets; traditionalist in his political and religious conviction, his style is derived from the Surrealists.

Elsewhere, French influence was paramount in the generation of poets born in 1914–15. When Orhan Veli died prematurely at 36 in 1951, Oktay Rifat, his friend and collaborator in *Garip*, wrote that ‘in his short life he experienced all the artistic adventures of several generations of French poets; and, through him, Turkish poetry has caught up with the European poetry of today’ (Halman, 2007: 347).

It would be right to assume that influence at this time was one-way, except perhaps this non-orientalist anecdote on the source of inspiration for Saint-Exupéry’s masterpiece:

I have serious reason to believe that the planet from which the Little Prince came is the asteroid known as B-612.

This asteroid has only once been seen through the telescope. That was by a Turkish astronomer, in 1909.

On making his discovery, the astronomer had presented it to the International Astronomical Congress, in a great demonstration. But he was in Turkish costume, and so nobody would believe what he said.

Grown-ups are like that...

Fortunately, however, for the reputation of Asteroid B-612, a Turkish dictator made a law that his subjects, under pain of death, change to European costume. So in 1920 the astronomer gave his demonstration all over again, dressed with impressive style and elegance. And this time everybody accepted his report.

(The Little Prince, Saint-Exupéry (1979: 17))

CHAPTER I: What is Poetry?

i. My Quest for a Muse

The examples chosen in search of a viable definition are drawn exclusively from a Western tradition. The absence of analytical writing on this subject in Turkish obliged me to turn to a tradition with superior qualities for self-analysis that, to my amazement, I could relate to positively, perhaps due to my self-assumed status as a cultural vagabond. This helped me considerably in my quest for a new identity, one that would be meaningful in the cultural environment in which I found myself, and as such added a fresh dimension to my own compositions. Particularly significant in this regard were the translations on which I initially embarked with some trepidation, feeling that this exercise might deprive me of my native identity without substituting another that was equally valid. I found, somewhat to my surprise, that Western authors who had attempted this difficult feat of analysis of something that had first occurred instinctively were able to discover their real selves in the process, thereby enriching not only themselves but their work.

ii The Poet, Past and Present

The poet, or to be more precise, the poet's role, has varied in history, not only from time to time but place to place. A poet's present diminished status as a decorative adjunct to a literate society can give no idea of the importance this vocation formerly enjoyed. In tribal society the role of the shaman was crucial, and the shaman always spoke differently from the people to indicate both the sacredness of the words and their potency, insofar as they came from another realm. Other than shamanism, in Greek and Roman tradition there were the oracles, and the oracle always delivered an ambiguous message that left it up to the listener to decipher and interpret. No matter how widespread the popularity of fashionable musicians cum poets, of which the shining example is Tom Jones, the singer (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Jones), their poems and songs affect the course of history in the way a shaman did or does. Shamans and oracles were the oratory of the poet, the translator between different realms of experience. The poet was an indispensable link oscillating between two worlds, the suprasensible world of the gods or ancestors or spirits

and the sensible world we know. The guidance of the shaman or oracle with the wisdom brought from the realm of the immortals was crucial to the prosperity, even the survival, of the tribe. In Celtic society, particularly Welsh Celtic society, the poet was a *vates* (seer, prophet), who prophesied what was going to happen. After the chieftain, the *vates* was the most important person in the tribal hierarchy. The decline in the social status of this role is not merely due to the supersession of the tribe as the basic socio-political unit but to the rise of secularism influenced by science, which finds scientific answers to what were previously mysteries and scientific solutions to the problems of existence leading to a concomitant diminution in the sense of the sacred. Bob Dylan, the musician poet (poet as pop artist), can be considered a vestigial survival of this primitive practice, even if he does not recognise this himself.

The role of the poet has evolved into something else, which would appear to be the poet having the role of connecting the different realms of experience of the split human personality, divided between reason and emotion. Dominance of reason would make us robotic and dominance of emotion would make us incapable of progressing. The poet can then be seen as the bridge or balance, the condition of equilibrium.

Bardic verse is a closely related category, for in tribal and ancient societies the bard was by no means a marginalised figure. The bard helped to embed people in their personal and regional identities, and sense of place and time, through stories and epics of their collective glories and heroisms, often glorifying death and sacrifice for the good of posterity. In a talk on Yeats delivered on 25 October 2011, Jonathan Bowden observed how:

in old Nordic culture where the poets were singers and reciters of song, the entire collective experience of the tribe was internalized by a songsmith. Somebody with a lute, somebody with a harp, somebody with what we would consider to be a primitive guitar, would play *Beowulf*, who would give out a threnody like an epic poem in a gathering where others would be silent or would drink or would occasionally join in.

(Bowden, 2012: 19–20)

Perhaps the closest analogy to the *vates* is the court poet, like the classic court poet, Virgil, whose task it was to acclaim the advent of a new era on the accession to power of Octavius as the Emperor Augustus, devising a fictional genealogy by which he ennobled and flattered the Roman Emperors, making them out to be heirs of the Trojans. However,

although in later eras the role of poets would steadily diminish in importance, they have never ceased to be soothsayers, even when ignored. Yeats's *The Second Coming* sees the poet garbed in traditional robes as a *vates* predicting the future:

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.

I believe that the poetic vocation has always been a hazardous one, fraught with peril for the person bold enough to undertake it. Graves writes:

The Night Mare is one of the cruellest aspects of the White Goddess. Her nests, when one comes across them in dreams, lodged in rock-clefts or the branches of enormous hollow yews, are built of carefully chosen twigs, lined with white horse-hair and the plumage of prophetic birds and littered with the jaw-bones and entrails of poets. The prophet Job said of her: 'She dwelleth and abideth upon the rock. Her young ones also suck up blood'. (Graves, 1997: 22)

It is not always easy to determine when the perception of the poet's function changed. The famous war poet Siegfried Sassoon said in 1917 that the war should be stopped, but was not shot or imprisoned; nevertheless, in spite of his protestations, the war did not stop as it would have in a shamanistic society, which shows how little poets are heeded in modern times. He was sent for psychiatric treatment, partly for his own protection. The case of Robert Lowell, who spent time in Sing Sing for saying much the same thing in 1942, comes instantly to mind as equally ineffectual in influencing the course of public events, illustrating how poets have been marginalised unless they share its values, as in the case of Rudyard Kipling, the shadow poet, even anti-poet, who uses words in sometimes beautiful ways to seduce and persuade. Historically the poetical voice of the Establishment poet has

always been the Poet Laureate (wearing laurels awarded by the regime) until recently, when Andrew Motion famously opposed the Gulf War.

Going back to Shelley, I would suggest that, whilst some poets are the legislators of mankind, many have used their skills to ask probing questions of whatever paradigm is dominant at the time. It is the asking or provoking of questions that is perhaps of great importance in the role of the poet, for to ask questions is a symbol of the freedom of the human being.

The revolution in poetry that followed the Georgians is usually dated 1922, the year that saw the publication of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*; and the function of the poet changed again. English literature entered an era of philosophical and political nihilism that reflected the tensions and anxieties of the age, created at least partly by the upheaval and trauma of the First World War.

Carlyle sees in the poet yet another class of hero, for whom he instances six categories: the Hero as Divinity, the Hero as Prophet, the Hero as Poet, and so on—all but the Hero as Translator, perhaps because it might have immodestly included himself, since he was the great interpreter to the Victorian Age of the Idealist philosophy, predominantly in the Germany of the early nineteenth century. As far as concerns the Hero as Prophet and the Hero as Poet, both share a common purpose: the communication to man of profound truths in virtue of the exceptional talent which with they are endowed: 'The hero is a messenger from the impalpable inane, bringing news for us'. Carlyle, a devotee not only of Goethe but of the Transcendentalist philosopher Fichte, quotes from the latter to the effect that the Man of Letters is a Prophet or, as he prefers to phrase it, a priest, continually unfolding the divine in Men:

Men of Letters are a perpetual Priesthood from age to age, teaching all men that a God is still present in their life, and that all 'Appearance', whatever we are in the world, is but a vesture of the 'Divine Idea of the World', for that lies at the bottom of 'Appearance'.

Poet-Priest-Vates-Hero are all related categories whose nominal distinctions are elided on closer acquaintance. Elsewhere, Carlyle expands on this, holding that:

Poet and Prophet differ greatly in our loose modern notions of them. In some old languages, again the titles are synonymous; *Vates* means both Prophet and Poet: and indeed at all times, Prophet and Poet, well understood, have much kindred of meaning. Fundamentally indeed they are still the same; in this most important respect especially, that they have penetrated, both of them, into the sacred mystery of the Universe; what Goethe calls 'the open secret.' 'Which is the great secret?' asks one.—'The open secret,' open to all, seen by almost none! That divine mystery, which lies everywhere in all Beings, 'the Divine Idea of the World, that which lies at the bottom of Appearance,' as Fichte styles it; of which all Appearance, from the starry sky to the grass of the field, but especially the Appearance of Man and his work, is but the vesture, the embodiment that renders it visible. This divine mystery is in all times and in all places; veritably is. In most times and places it is greatly overlooked; and the Universe, definable always in one or the other dialect, as the realized Thought of God, is considered a trivial, inert, commonplace matter,—as if, says the Satirist, it were a dead thing, which some upholsterer had put together! It could do no good, at present, to speak much about this; but it is a pity for every one of us if we do not know it, lives ever in the knowledge of it. Really a most mournful pity,—a failure to live at all, if we live otherwise!

The Hero is similarly related to time and space. Space is the locality where or whence he operates, but time is his real dimension because the relevance of his message transcends temporality. Rilke emphasises this point in the fifth of the Duineser Elegien, the hero elegy:

Consider: the Hero continues, even his setting
 Was a pretext for further existence, an ultimate birth.
 A hero is not bounded by temporality; he occupies a fulcrum in time
 Nor is he circumscribed by mundane considerations, for only ultimacy
 matters:
 Each torpid of the world has such disinherited children,
 To whom no longer what's been nor what's not yet coming belongs.
 Duration doesn't concern him. His rising's existence.

Although he transcends temporality, the Hero, whether Prophet, Priest or Poet, never fails to make use of time to define or refine his or her message by going into retreat, a retreat whence the retreatant emerges transfigured. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, when Zarathustra comes down from the mountains to proclaim his message he is recognised by an old man: ‘No stranger to me is this wanderer: many years ago he passed by here. Zarathustra he was called but now he has transformed himself.’ This conflates the experience of other Prophet-Priest-Poets in history, not just Zarathustra, the founder of Zoroastrianism, but Jesus’ ‘lost years’ before he was baptised by the John the Baptist, and Muhammad’s periodical retreat in the Cave of Hira before the Archangel Gabriel revealed to him the first (chronological) surah of the Qur’an, Surat al-’Alaq (Zaki, forthcoming).

A.E. Waite, an expert on the Tarot, stresses the importance of this phase in the lives of these categories, whilst discoursing on the esoteric meaning of the card entitled ‘The Hermit’. Joseph Campbell, the well-known mythographer in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, inserts a diagram to illustrate the trajectory of the mythological hero. This hero undertakes a perilous course, isolating himself from common humanity for a long period of withdrawal during which he experiences all manner of tribulations that form part of a quest for gnosis. The author comments:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonders (X). Fabulous beasts are there encountered and a decisive victory (Y) [is] won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (Z).

Conforming to this pattern are Prometheus and the archetypal hero, Theseus, to whom as to their other heroes, the Ancient Greeks erected a special kind of temple (ἡρώον). Despite the Hero-Poet conflation, perhaps not many poets experience exactly this trajectory, but one case that springs instantly to mind is the earliest Scottish poet, Thomas the Rhymer. Seated under a thorn tree on one of the three Eildon Hills, Thomas was surprised to see approaching him the Queen of Fairyland, who proceeded to carry him off to her fairy castle. Before parting, she bestowed on him the gift of prophesy. Only when he returned to the mortal realm did he realise that seven years had passed. Before leaving, he asked for a token to remember her by. She offered him the choice between becoming a harper (equates to ‘bard’) or a seer. He chose the latter, and it was this that enabled him to predict the tragedies that would come upon his native land following the death of Alexander III, who

died in an accident thus leaving no heir to the throne, a circumstance that provided the English King Edward I with the pretext he needed to invade Scotland and annex it to England. In Scotland it is said that those who have the second sight wish they did not have it, and this must have been the case with Thomas. His fateful encounter with the Queen of Fairyland under the thorn tree is commemorated by a stele marking the traditional site of the tree, with an inscription recording that it was here that Thomas the Rhymer met the Fairy Queen, ‘whereby he was inspired to utter the first notes of the Scottish Muse’.

On a personal note, although I never had the pleasure of kissing a fairy queen or spending seven years of supernatural bliss in her castle, I see my own odyssey as having something in common with that of the Scottish poet. Unable to live under the constraints of military rule that denied me the right of self-expression, I quit my unhappy country to come to Britain and establish myself as a translator into English of sorrowful poems by writers even less fortunate than myself. This conferred on them the boon of making both their work and their situation known outside Turkey, where censorship forbade free expression and prevented their work from being published, whilst simultaneously conferring on a benighted British public the dubious boon of alerting them to the injustices perpetrated in their name.

iii Definition of Poetry: One or Several?

There is no single definition of poetry that fits all cases. Exactly as the poet’s vocation varies, so alters the definition of what he is doing. It is possible to contend that there are as many definitions of poetry as there are poets. The function of poetry has changed over time with corresponding shifts of emphasis; definitions seldom agree. Perhaps one of the most famous is Wordsworth’s in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, how poetry is ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’. Since the phrase is so often quoted in isolation, it is worth examining it in context:

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears: and an emotion kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced and does itself actually exist in the mind. (Wordsworth, 1828: 55)

This seeks to define poetry via the mechanism of inspiration. It does so by linking poetry to the pleasure principle, and could be construed as conducive to a hedonistic understanding of the subject, in which case the success of a poem can be measured in proportion to the quantity of pleasure its reading produces. Heaney (1989: 151) phrases the same thing somewhat differently:

a set of images springs into presence and into motion as at a whimsical but unignorable command. They represent extreme extension of the Imagist mode, which Pound characterized as expressing an emotional and intellectual complex in a moment of time. (Heaney, 1989: 151, on Plath)

This definition is difficult to reconcile with T.S. Eliot's famous dictum that nothing should be expressed in poetry that can be expressed in prose. The two operate in different, even opposing directions (Eliot, 1963a).

Wordsworth's definition is subjective; as befits a Romantic writing a manifesto for Romanticism, whereas Eliot describes himself as a Classicist. Yet Wordsworth quotes from Aristotle, who laid down canons for Classicism, that poetry:

is the most philosophic of all writing; its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives strength and divinity to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature. (Wordsworth, 1828: 55)

Support for Eliot's view can be sought in the kindred art of music, to which poetry bears a close relation not solely due to metrical structure and the rhythm and regularity which makes for its adaption to music. Eliot's own practice in using the rhythms of common speech, as in *The Waste Land* and *The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock*, apparently contradicts this. His practice would seem to accord poetry a median status, intermediate between poetry and music.

I had started to write and publish verse long before I encountered any of these attempts at rationalising something that may lie beyond the bounds of reason so, without affirming one to be correct and the others wrong, I find myself obliged to see some common ground not

only between them, but between them and myself. If forced to decide I should say that it is the intensity factor that distinguishes poetry from prose. I recognise myself as an intuitionist but also an innovator.

As a poet whose work is charged with eroticism, Graves' definition is of great interest but only valid in respect of European poetry. Even then, it only holds for poetry for which his own controversial thesis holds good, that all poetry is a form of homage to the Threefold Goddess in her triple capacity as mother, bride, and layer-out:

all to poetry... celebrates some incident or scene in this very ancient story
and these three main characteristics are so much part of our racial
inheritance that they only assert themselves in poetry but recur on
occasions of emotional stress in the form of dreams, paranoiac visions,
and delusions when it comes to poetry from my region of the world.
They do not particularly help, in my opinion, to understand the contexts
and motivations for poetry in Arabic, Turkish, Persian or Urdu as well as
the poetry itself: for, as has been observed, 'What love is to the
Westerner Islam is to the Oriental, inspiring ninety per cent of his poetry,
his art and his music'.

All these traditions come under the rubric of love/devotional poetry (Liddell, 1958). In Western traditions there is a great deal of analysis and deconstruction of poetry; in an Eastern tradition poets just write it and people respond. Western poetry can be romantic, political or satirical, and so too are Turkish poets, but deconstruction and categorisation is not undertaken to the extent that it is in Western literary tradition.

Hypersensitivity coupled with intensity of feeling sets the poet apart from common humanity. Schopenhauer, in his brilliant essay on the nature of genius in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, refers the reader to a passage in Byron's *The Prophecy of Dante*, Canto IV, (Galt, 1835) as showing that for a poet unusual intensity of feeling is a prerequisite:

For what is poesy but to create
From overfeeling good or ill; and aim

At an external life beyond our fate,
And be the new Prometheus of new men,
Bestowing fire from heaven, and then, too late,

Finding the pleasure given repaid with pain,
And vultures to the heart of the bestower.

(Lord Byron, *Dante*, Canto IV, in Galt 1835: 513)

I am not alone in thinking that the poet is differentiated from other people by a morbid capacity for feeling; Monk Gibbon's pinprick, which feels like a sword-thrust (his suffering, like joy, exceeds those of the average person). Hypersensitive to the point of morbidity, he is prone to over-react on account of the unusual strength of his emotions; emotion demands expression and the poet cannot relax unless and until catharsis succeeds the emotion.

iv. Poetry: A Natural History

The category of poetry resulting from vision is very important, especially where the object is perceived under the influence of a drug-induced condition; or, to an example from the kindred art of music, Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique*, composed under the influence of opium. A work of American literature, *The Wizard of Oz* by Frank Brown, when transferred to the screen, was used by drug-users of the Flower Power era to trip upon. Coleridge's morbidly acute sensibility intensified by drugs produced 'Kubla Khan', which should be compared with de Quincey's description in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (de Quincey, 1986: 105), where he says how it was enough for him to think of the words 'Consul Romanus' for the whole panoply of a consular procession in Ancient Rome to come instantly before his mental vision:

The ladies danced, and looked as lovely as the court of George IV. Yet I knew, even in my dream, that they had been in the grave for nearly two

centuries.—This pageant would suddenly dissolve: and, at a clapping of hands, would be heard the heart-quaking sound of *Consul Romanus*: and immediately came ‘sweeping by’, in gorgeous paludaments, Paulus or Marius, girt round by a company of centurions, with the crimson tunic hoisted on a spear, and followed by the *alalagmos* of the Roman legions. (De Quincey, 1986: 105)

Yet it would seem that successful evocation of Ancient Rome merely by uttering two words from one of his favourite authors (Livy) is not accessible to the modern experimenter with drugs, because the psychedelic experience signifies merely an intensification of an everyday reality, for instance looking at a vase of flowers and seeing them intensified in colour, and not the transport to another world or a different time experienced by Romantics. The hiatus separating and differentiating the two classes of experience is expressed by Aldous Huxley (2004: 4–5) in a memorable passage from that classic of the hippy age, *The Doors of Perception*:

To see ourselves as others see us is a most salutary gift. Hardly less important is the capacity to see others as they see themselves. But what if these others belong to a different species and inhabit a radically alien universe? For example, how can the sane get to know what it actually feels like to be mad? Or, short of being born again as a visionary, a medium or a musical genius, how can we ever visit the worlds which, to Blake, to Swedenbourg, to Johann Sebastian Bach, were home? And how can a man at the extreme limits of ectomorphy and cerebrotonia ever put himself in the place of one at the limits of endomorphy and viscerotonia or, except within certain circumscribed areas, share the feelings of one who stands at the limits of mesomorphy and somatotonia? To the unmitigated behaviourist such questions, I suppose, are meaningless. But for those who theoretically believe what in practice they know to be true—namely, that there is an inside to experience as well as an outside—the problems posed are real problems, all the more grave for being, some completely insoluble, some soluble only in exceptional circumstances and by methods not available to everyone. Thus, it seems virtually certain that I shall never know what it feels like to be Sir John Falstaff or Joe Louis. On the other hand, it had always seemed to me possible that, through hypnosis, for

example, or auto-hypnosis, by means of systematic meditation, or else by taking the appropriate drug, I might so change my ordinary mode of consciousness as to be able to know, from the inside, what the visionary, the medium, even the mystic were talking about.

Two conclusions follow from the passage just quoted. Either we do not now have the same stock of images to draw upon in the throes of literary creation as our Romantic predecessors, and are therefore unlikely to produce a second ‘Kubla Khan’ or ‘Christabel’; or mescaline, and by inference other psychedelic drugs, belong to a pharmaceutical category that, acting upon the brain, produces a different kind of physiological effect. In the former case we can only repeat what Baudelaire says in *Les paradis artificiels*, that drugs cannot introduce into the vision anything not already present in the mind of the drug-taker. This recalls what Dickens has to say in *Edwin Drood*, how, where the hero sees a cathedral, the slut in the adjoining bed sees only a butcher’s shop. In *Edwin Drood*, when the hero comes out of an opium dream the iron spikes on top of the bed-posts, under the influence of the drug, are transformed into the towers of a church (probably Rochester Cathedral, near where Dickens was living at the time). Or comparable examples in Sadek Hedayet’s *Buf-i-Kur (The Blind Owl)*, an entire book influenced by opium. Opium is pre-eminently the literary drug, favoured by the literary set, especially the Decadents, notably Gautier and Baudelaire (the famous Club des Hachichins located in the Isle de Saint Louis, to which the literati of the epoch resorted).

With visionary poetry in general, poetry returns to its primitive roots in ritual and magic (bardic verse). Visionary poetry is primarily prophecy, of which the classic case is Blake’s *Prophetical Books* (e.g. *Jerusalem*), where poetry and the visual arts conjoin in an unusual synthesis due to his unique graphic art method. In the *Prophetical Books* Blake assumes the ancient mantle of the seer, in this case one who foresees the future of Britain.

Perhaps the best definition of visionary verse is that given by one of its foremost practitioners, Lord Byron, where in Canto II (Galt, 1835), he writes of:

Their children's children's doom already brought
Forth from the abyss of time which is to be,
The chaos of events, where lie half-wrought

Shapes that must undergo mortality

(Lord Byron, *The Prophecy of Dante*, Canto II, in Galt 1835: 499)

Although in the same canto he hails ‘the great Seers of Israel’, he would not assume the mantle of a seer himself but prophesises vicariously through Dante, who foresaw a great future for his country as Blake did for Britain in the *Prophetical Book*—*whilst confessing his own inadequacy*:

Amidst the clash of swords, and clang of helms,
The age which I anticipate, no less 71
Shall be the Age of Beauty, and while whelms

Calamity the nations with distress,
The genius of my country shall arise,
A Cedar towering o'er the Wilderness,

Lovely in all its branches to all eyes,
Fragrant as fair, and recognized afar,
Wafting its native incense through the skies.

Sovereigns shall pause amidst their sport of war
Wean'd for an hour from blood, to turn and gaze
On canvas or on stone; and they who mar

Ah beauty upon earth, compell'd to praise,
Shall feel the power of that which they destroy?
And Art's mistaken gratitude shall raise.

In the preface to the poem Byron invokes the shades of Horace, Nereus (*Prophesy of Troy*), and the Greek poet Nycophron who, in 'Alexandra', writes at length about the raticinatory words of the Trojan princess Cassandra, seeing in them forerunners of his own attempt.

These observations may appear to be valid only in the context of one kind of poetry. There is political poetry (Shelley's 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind'), laying down canons not only for aesthetic appreciation but for political and social morality. Perhaps only in the context of Islamic society can poetry have major political repercussions or cause an insurrection. Two examples must suffice: Abu Ishaq al-Ilbiri's poem inciting the populace to revolt against Jewish domination in the Sultanate of Granada in the eleventh century led to a local pogrom. To cite another example, this time from Ottoman history, in the Lale Devri (Tulip Period) during the reign of Ahmed III expenditure on tulips and extravagant parties and poems by Nedim and Nabi led to political upheaval, and as a consequence the Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha was beheaded. Perhaps only in Islam could flowers cause a revolution, but these instances foreshadow the importance of our revolutionary, or political, poems, as I have personally experienced when writers I knew set out on purpose to satirise military rule in prose or verse.

Much satirical verse falls into this category, notably some of the productions of Dryden and Pope, but before them Butler, who in 'Hudibras' satirises the foibles of the Puritans of the English Commonwealth. There are also not a few poets belonging to the classical and modern era in Turkish poetry, in which case Shelley is not correct, for occasionally poets can be acknowledged legislators, even if only acknowledged by the minority.

Although I had not read 'Hudibras' at the time I wrote the poem, I see now how my 'A Visit to the Park' unconsciously draws analogies between the hypocrisies of the two commonwealths, the one which Butler knew and the one I experienced as a similarly alienated youth writing poetry to expose the falsity of the military's claims:

Let's see what we have here in this place
which looks like a park but isn't
which wasn't here yesterday
but seems certain to stand its ground

There is a lot going on
The star attraction is the academy of death

where they teach you how to feed yourself
to your appointed end
with dignity, conviction, accuracy
There is a special course where one can learn
and earn
the glory and wisdom of self-sacrifice
for the benefit of historians, cameramen, and correspondents

We saw women mastering the knack of becoming
exemplary war widows
of bringing fully armed children
into a world of patient cemeteries

We were treated to a fashion show
where those who were about to die
displayed their latest shrouds
shrouds made of chintz, plastic or hungry flags

We saw children made keen
to carry their graves on their backs
volunteering for lunacies
beyond the call of duty

We saw children who dreamt of draping
cenotaphs with their own skins
then we heard up-to-date funeral music for all tastes
dodecatonic, concrete or electronic

Finally we were shown the talents
of pitiless hunters
who could torture anything
even abandoned houses
We were so impressed
we forgot to applaud
but then we saw a child who was flying
a kite in his head

The kite looked embedded in the sky

(‘A Visit to the Park’, Mevlut Ceylan, *Seasons from Other Seeds*, 2011c)

Without being aware, I was reproducing the clichés about patriotism inspired by Wilfred Owen (1963: 55) 'Dulce et Decorum Est'. I subjoin the poem for purposes of comparison:

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

(Owen, 'Dulce et Decorum Est', in Day Lewis (ed.), 1963: 55)

CHAPTER II: Original Poetic Work

I have chosen to look at three books of my poetry, written over three decades. I do this not to deconstruct but to illuminate the links between works that have importance for my identity as a poet, a professional and as a Turk. I do it with a strong sense of belonging to my country and my people and what that belonging means, and how I have manifested it as I am now also a citizen of the world.

i. *Seasons From Other Seeds* (first decade: 1975–85)

Looking over the poems in this book, I see them as being written thematically. They seem to me to be haunted by sentiments of disillusionment, pessimism and despair, but somewhere, written against the background of an unremitting political repression, there is hope in the flashes of acerbic wit embedded in figures of speech and metaphor:

We are all short-listed
In the heart of the headsman
But surely we can think
Of better ways
Of saying farewell

(extract from 'Pilgrim', *Seasons from Other Seeds*, 2011c)

Suicides are buried at crossroads, so if their vengeful, embittered spirits prowl after death they are confused and do not know which road to take. Irony dominates 'The Hanging', where I am advised only to find myself:

to go through urgent mirrors
to take stock of my image
and the contents of my heart
Hanging in many mirrors
in the shape of the wounded soldier

Justice here unanimous like death
it is very much admired by tourists
who come in their thousands
to collect eternal decorations.

Redemption is something familiar to all students of comparative religion. It is religion that alleviates the bleakness of the blasted landscape I see when I observe an ugly modernity. This echoes the final lines of the Qur'an, where it says how for all animals God knows the form of praise proper to each:

Bare feet I have
most of the time
In the night
Voices praise Him
On the roofs
Cats and birds are the first
To see the unity

(Mevlut Ceylan, *Seasons from Other Seeds*, 1986)

‘And Solomon was David’s heir. And he said: O mankind! We have been taught the language of birds, and have been given (abundance) of all things. This surely is evident favour’ (Qur’an, 27: 16). This what Iqbal (Fourth Lecture on the revival of Religious Thought in Islam) meant when he claimed the vision of the Qur’an is essentially an anti-Classical, by which he meant anti-Aristotelian, concept. He was referring to the Aristotelian concept of an anthropocentric world, which is textually negated by the Qur’an *vide* the passage quoted, which stands in antithetical opposition to what Aristotle says in *Politics*: that only Man is possessed of the faculty of speech.

In the *Kaulturkamph* initiated by Ataturk’s westernising policies there was much ugliness, at its most visible in certain suburbs of Istanbul and practically whole of Ankara, where much design was by a Modernist Austrian architect in the 1920s. It is negatively seen in the suppression, indeed the persecution of traditional art forms such as calligraphy and illumination, and Ebru in the visual arts, also in the suppression of traditional Ottoman

music, such as keeping policemen stationed at the doorstep of the musician, Mevlevi, to ensure he could not train people and transmit Ottoman music to future generations. The modernist movement in European poetry that both Hikmet and Fazıl were abreast of were the channels by which the innovations of this movement reached Turkish literature, whilst reacting politically against the semi-colonial domination of the Ottoman Empire, as seen in the humiliating terms of Capitulations, signifying as they do a major abdication of sovereignty.

One of the perils that attend the mystic path, the aspiration toward God, is when the Sufi experience of what St John of the Cross called ‘the dark night of the soul’ is alluded to. The spectacle of human and animal suffering inclines me toward empathy and compassion, as in the lines of ‘He Loved Animals’:

He loved animals
to the death
they were his bread and butter
the fawn did not run
he did not shoot
walked back home
with a soft heart
to embrace peace

(‘He Loved Animals’, Mevlut Ceylan, *ibid.*)

ii. ***Against the Wall* (second decade: 1985–95)**

I published *Against the Wall* in 2012. The poems included in the collection were written during the years 2005–12. I believe the collection in some way reflects my own identity, standing as it does between cultures and faiths still at war elsewhere, seeking in myself a state of reconciliation from the tensions and conflict brought on by the different influences that have been brought to bear on me. Most obviously, of course, I mean my present position, living in London as a Turk and a Muslim. But a Turk is also a combination of different cultures, histories and identities, a mixture fraught with the deposit of Ottoman and post-Ataturk cultures, and those of East and West, and North and South. When the Greeks founded the city of Byzantium and Constantine and re-founded it as

Constantinople, the new capital of the Roman Empire, they were conscious of the significance of the site, poised at a point where continents meet, where physical, cultural and linguistic walls collide. Turkey, and indeed every Turk, remains poised at this point. The politics of modern Turkey reflect this in this many ways. Modern Turks are a highly confused people, interred at the crossroads of the mind, not knowing which way to look or which route to take, eternal victims of an identity crisis that began with the Tanzimat and has gone on unremittingly ever since. This accounts for treaties, alliances and all manner of crises, a mindset bequeathed them and generations before them by the reforms of 1828.

In fact, the literal wall that inspired the collection's title is that which the Israelis have built to separate themselves from the Palestinians. But as the Jew is now at war with the Muslim in the Holy Land and frequently the aggressor, this part of the world at the same time is sacred and central to three faiths whose tenets are diffused across the world. Islam began there too, and until recently it was part of the Turkish Empire. There is still something in me that feels it is part of my native land. And that Israeli wall, that division, that line of demarcation in the sand, holding in, holding out, is a metaphorisation of the Turkish dilemma as well as my own, both an expatriate and cosmopolite.

The title comes from a notable poem in the collection, 'The Promised Land'. Walls operate as a symbol of liminality and can have positive or negative connotation according to context. The *limes* on the Rhine protected almost the entire Roman Empire and the people living within its boundaries, likewise Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall in Britain, in contrast to which the wall against which people are executed by firing squad indicates connotes a different kind of liminality: a line drawn in the sand:

by the desert wind with metallic hand
Today the border is closed
It was closed yesterday
It will be closed tomorrow
today we stand here alone
against the wall
we stood alone yesterday
we shall not be alone tomorrow

‘Flotilla’ is intensely metaphorical, the meaning being much less immediately apparent than in ‘The Promised Land’, the ships becoming first birds, then sea horses, blissfully cruising the calm waters on an errand of mercy, until

one day
many ghouls ambushed
the blue horses
and blue birds
on a dark dark night

With the result that those aboard the ship *Mavi Marmara* who were killed—six at the time of writing, but later turning out to involve nine—bade goodbye to life. Then, as if recoiling from the horror of such a deed, in ‘Dedication’ an *engagé* poet prays that those responsible may be visited with retribution:

Six blue birds
Six blue horses
Waved to waves
in this world of horrors
prayers entwined with heat
the vessel of
hell fire
dedicated to disillusion

‘Rainbow’ is a poem about bereavement, about how a parent must feel on the death of a child, the sheer unnaturalness of it all; and the book reflects the vividness of the metaphors that occur and recur in every poem I writes, such as:

Rainbows fade abruptly
Like story-book-ghosts
And hope in the heart dies
**
The sum of intrusive monologue
in the mind
aches
by the cliff-edge of hope

Here I used a metaphor drawn from landscape, a Romantic device whereby objective Nature appears to reflect the poet's subjective moods, despair, or even fear as in the following passage from another poem, 'Division', where the metaphor, auditory rather than visual unlike the foregoing, achieves the same indemnificatory effect by means of an epithet with figurative as well as literal meaning:

this is the picture of
an unborn voice
word in denial
like shrill whistle
that divides time into
Ill-derived expectations

(‘Division’, Mevlut Ceylan, *Against the Wall*, 2012a)

Here the impact comes, I believe, from the unexpectedness of the comparison and the yoking of a noun with a seemingly inappropriate adjective, both devices used by the Metaphysicals. These lines are reminiscent of Donne's tropes and are in his style, Donne being a favourite of mine to whom I was first drawn by Eliot's focus on Jacobean and Carolean poetry, but also finding in the language of the Metaphysicals a startling modernity that seemed much of our own time. I was also drawn for personal reasons to their devotional poetry, not merely Donne's but Herbert's and Vaughan's, as for instance where the latter says:

They are all gone into the world of light!

And I alone sit ling'ring here,

Their very memory is fair and bright,

And my sad thoughts doth clear.

It glows and glitters in my cloudy breast,

Like stars upon some gloomy grove

Or those faint beams in which this hill is dress'd,

After the sun's remove.

('They are all Gone into the World of Light', Vaughan, in Pettet, 1960, ch. 9: 155)

and

sandstorms
in my heart
form caves
that suffocate

(Mevlut Ceylan, *ibid.*)

However, Donne's allusions are biblical, whereas these are Qur'anic or from the Life of the Prophet:

I am the spider
Busy designing
A door for a cave
Where I hid
My love

(Mevlut Ceylan, *ibid.*)

The allusion here is to an incident during the Flight from Mecca to Medinah, when the Prophet's enemies were searching for him to kill him and he was only saved by the timely intervention of a spider, which fortuitously wove a web across the mouth of the cave in which the Prophet was hiding.

iii. ***Good Friday* (third decade: 1995–2005)**

Haiku is, at least to a Western mind coming to it unprepared, less a poem than the seed of a poem, leaving the poem to germinate in the reader's mind into something more ponderous, 'something of the reader's own' from which the poet refrained. 'Have you heard this one about the Haiku, that it is a single finger pointing at the moon?' This poses the translator with a challenge: crossing a cultural boundary, because all Japanese literature, not just poetry, is an exercise in understatement, in tangential expression that hints but seldom

states, always implicit rather than explicit, demanding from the reader a different kind of response than would a poem written by a European.

Haiku has, consequent upon its brevity, an immediacy of impact, a quality of startling readers into a different frame of mind from that to which they are customarily adjusted. It has a different mode of understanding, like a Koan in Zen Buddhism (e.g. You know the sound of two hands clapping. What is the sound of one hand clapping?). This takes us away from Cartesian logic to a world where logic no longer obtains, a post-logical universe where Aristotle and Descartes are at a loss, precisely because the content is not amenable to *ratio*, as Yeats memorably put it: ‘Measurement began our might’—‘*our*’ in contradistinction to what he calls ‘all Asiatic vague immensities’. The latter metaphor refers to the nebulous nature of much Indian philosophy (with which Yeats was familiar from his acquaintance with Blavatsky’s writings (through Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, 1831–91, a Russian-born occultist), here contrasted with rationability and measurement, our heritage from Antiquity. After all, a Haiku is more notable for what it does not say than what it does, leaving the reader to fill in the gaps, the unwritten poem, even the unvoiced poem to which I have already referred as potentially present in the spare three lines of the Haiku.

In my own writing in Haiku form I have sought to address the issue of how to surmount the linguistic/semantic/cultural frontier, and I believe the Haiku challenges our preconceptions of what is poetry. Both Haiku and Koan have common ground in the Zen tradition, which is why a European is so disposed to misunderstand Buddhism, because Zen at least proceeds not by logic but by negation, with the result that he risks ending up in a false syncretism (the Flower Power syndrome). In short, it is the Maharishi phenomenon, a combination of drawing-room Hinduism embraced by hippies, incapable of understanding text like the *Upanishads*.

It was the Beat poet Alan Ginsberg who coined the term ‘Flower Power’. Although much of it began as a socio-cultural phenomenon, it attests to a crisis in Western, particularly American, society and to deep-seated neuroses in the psyche of Western man, dissatisfied with the material culture of capitalism. However, if such individuals sincerely want to attempt to transcend contemporary Western materialism, they might be better advised to pursue enlightenment from within their own tradition—for example, Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), a German theologian, philosopher and mystic, or even Sufism, which does

not rely quite to the same degree on a way of thinking alien to the Western mind. I believe I have gone some way to overcome this difficulty, inherent as it is in the challenge of translation, and the crossing of cultural boundaries as where I cite a quotation from Psalm poem- Sa'id Ibn Ali the well-known ninth century sufi writer, as an epigraph to Psalms. Here I used quasi-sufistic language that approximates sufi forms of communication in seeking to convey the meaning of something ineffable and therefore metalinguistic in that it seeks to reach, by means of paradox that which is non-communicable that which lies beyond the language.

These trans-national objectives are already implicit in the title, *Good Friday*, which itself crosses more than one frontier since Friday means different things to different people. In the Western tradition, Good Friday signifies the day on which Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice put salvation within reach of everyone irrespective of race. To a person of Jewish faith it means the Friday evening meal, the Sabbath, for in Semitic calendars (i.e. perception of time) a day begins from the night before, that is to say sunset, not at sunrise. To a Muslim, Friday signifies not a Sabbath to commemorate God resting after having created the world in six days, but rather the weekly day of communal prayer, of collective worship, when the Muslim community (city, town, village or hamlet) assembles to make a collective affirmation of faith, as conveyed by the word for Friday (Jum'a) in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, signifying assembly, gathering, affirmation of unity through common purpose. In this fashion, at least three confessional boundaries are crossed even before the book begins.

CHAPTER III: Poetry in Translation

Central to the issue of translation is the age-old debate going back at least as far as Plato: poets were debarred his ideal republic on the grounds that poetry is not amenable to reason, and therefore incompatible with good government. Conducive to anarchy, it menaces the stability of any well-regulated society. There are those in the religious traditions who believe poets can be a force for good or heresy. Some of the great poets were strongly religiously aligned, and it did not make their poetry less beautiful. I acknowledge this but I also see poetry as a unifying metaphor for understanding between difference, and that is why I translate.

Theology, although rational in terms of methodology, has for subject matter the irrational: it is revelatory, so is not subject to empirical criteria of verification or falsification. Because it entails an act of faith by affirming the existence of a *theos* it is, like all religion, a leap in the dark. Similarly, poets trade in the unreasonable; they rely on intuition rather than logic for their affirmations. Because of its essential irrationality, intuiting truth rather than proving it, Plato held that poetry is not conducive to good government and justice—and the ghost of Socrates is hard to exorcise. In certain hands poetry can even be a lethal weapon; in Spain in the eleventh century it proved to be so on one occasion in the case of the Hispano-Arabic poet Abu Ishaq al-Ilbiri's poem that provoked a pogrom in Granada because of the fiery language in which it was composed. This disproves Auden's contention that poetry makes nothing happen. It came at a time when Jewish influence was dominant in the Sultanate of Granada, under the nominal rule of the Zirids.

The verb 'to translate' means, literally, to move something from one place to another. Primarily, what is moved is the content, the meaning; less susceptible of translation is style. In either case the challenge facing translators is complicated by the language from which they translate, or move, the meaning, and the language to which it is moved. In the case of languages belonging to the same linguistic group, like German and Dutch, perhaps not too much is lost in either direction, likewise with translation from French into Provençal or from Provençal into French. Where, however, the languages belong to distinct linguistic groups, for instance Romance languages and Celtic, the problem of translation may even be insuperable and the translator resorts to paraphrase. The late James Kirkup, writing to the Turkish poet Feyyaz Fergar, referring to René Char's habit of

treating words as if they were mosaic *tesserae*, juxtaposing them for colourful effect, makes precisely this point:

I think French, with its greater Latinity, lends itself more to this kind of plastic technique than English with its awkward Anglo-Saxonisms.

Almost always when Char uses abstract terms I find I have to reproduce their English equivalents, sometimes identical, but the English terms lack the resonance of the French ones. It can't be helped. (Personal communication: letter from James Kirkup, 20 April 1987)

The translator's predicament is not limited to semantics, for style is even more problematic than meaning to carry over from one language to another. In the case of Ottoman and modern Turkish, the meaning may survive translation but the style does not, in what has been dubbed 'the incommensurability of semantic content' (Steiner, 1997).

Translation may be defined as follows: the replacement of textual, material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language (TL). (Catford, 1965: 20)

Catford's definition begs the question of the text's semantic content, and equally that any translation is necessarily a hermeneutical exercise. Hermeneutics is pivotal to the functioning of certain societies, for instance the use of the *Midrash* amongst Jews and the various *tafsirs* amongst Muslims, because in both cases a legal decision can hinge on how the jurist interprets a particular text. In Islamic Law the *faqih* (jurisconsult) has to know not only the relevant passages in the Qur'an but to be conversant with the commentaries and super-commentaries, all in addition to basic legal textbooks like the *Muwatta'* of Ibn Malik and standard works in use amongst the other four legal schools. All are instrumental in the formulation of a *hukm* (judgment), even the publication of a *fatwa* (legal ruling), applicable to other cases than that on which the jurist is sitting in judgment in the court over which he presides. The works referred to are all prose, but the problem is magnified in the case of poetry because the language of poetry differs sensibly from that of prose in being intensely metaphorical and not infrequently ambiguous. It is precisely this ambiguity that frightened Plato into banning poets from his Republic.

If these remarks apply to prose, with how much greater force do they apply to poetry? The problem of translation obtains on more than one level. Translators can only be fully confident of the accuracy of their translation when translating from their own work, something that

happens very seldom. Otherwise, the translator confronts the problem of understanding and following the thought processes of another person, who may be dead or otherwise inaccessible for consultation. The margin for error is expanded when the text belongs to a language group different from the translator's own. This can vary from approximately compatible languages (e.g. Indo-European) to languages using different forms of lexical expression, for instance ideograms or pictograms, where inevitably the translation involves guesswork. Occupying a position intermediate between these extremes is the Semitic language group where the meaning is contained in a trilateral root capable of being understood in different ways, with a primary signification and secondary or even tertiary ones, and the meaning selected must depend on context. But one problem applies in all cases: do you translate words or the idea the author is seeking to convey? The translator has to opt for one meaning, that which seems the closest to what the author is trying to get across.

The translator's role in respect of creativity is considered by some as inevitably 'one of insuperable inferiority in the service of the poet' (*ibid.*). This is acknowledged by Wordsworth, where he says:

it is proper that he [a poet] should consider himself in the situation of a translator, who deems himself justified when he substitutes excellences of another kind for those which are unattainable by him, and endeavours occasionally to surpass (emphasis added) his original, in order to make some amends for the general inferiority to which he feels that he must submit.

Whilst, ideally, it takes a poet to understand another poet, the translator's persona may obtrude on or obscure the message the poet wants to convey. An indispensable attribute of the successful translator is familiarity with the language, which may account for how some of the best results arise from a combination of talents. A word on the neglected subject of translation as a consortial art may not be out of place. Sometimes, in translating poetry from languages that are not cognate, success is due to a combination of talents, as in contrasting approaches to the problem exemplified by two versions of the same poem by Edip Cansever, one translated by Azmi Özkan and the other by Feyyaz Kayacan:

No Ordinary Table

The man in the joy of living
On the table his keys he put
The flowers in the copper bowl he put
His milk and his egg he put
The light coming from the window he put
The sound of the bicycle, the sound of the
 spinning wheel
The softness of bread and air he put
The man on the table
That which he had in mind he put
What he wanted in life to do
Thus he put
Whom he loved whom he loved not
The man on the table he put
Three times three makes nine
The man on the table the nine he put
He was beside the window, beside the heaven
He stretched and on the table infinity he put
For life a beer he craved
On the table the spilling of the beer he put
His drowsiness, he put, his awakening he put
His satisfaction, his hunger he put
No ordinary table this
It did not react to such a burden
Once, twice it swayed, it stopped
The man relentlessly kept on putting

In the midst of the joy of living
The man put his keys on the table
He put on it the copper bowl and the flowers
His milk and egg,
The light coming in through the window,
The sound of the bicycle, the sound of the
 spinning wheel
The softness of bread and air.
The man put on the table
All that went on in his head,
The things he wanted to do in life
He put them on the table exactly.
People he liked and disliked
He put them also on the table.
Three times three makes nine
He put the nine on the table.
He was near the window, near the sky,
He leaned across and put infinity on the table.
He put on it his sleep and his awakening.
He put on it his hunger and his satiety.
This was no ordinary table,
It was not put out by such a load,
It swayed once or twice then steadied itself.
The man went on adding

(‘Sözlüksel uyumluluk Bağlamında Masa da Masaymış Ha!’, Özkardeş, 1989)

Though apparently similar, the modes of approach are radically different. Feyyaz’s translation does not aim at an elegance or literary effect that might impede enjoyment of the poetry by erecting unsolicited barriers between writer and reader. Rather, he adheres literarily to the sense, whereas Azmi Özkan’s approach is altogether different, to convey

something of the response the poem would evoke in a Turk encountering it for the first time, using both rhyme and assonance rather than metre. There is no way to decide which is the better translation; both are good, and the choice depends on the personal responses of the reader.

Both translators meet the requirements of a good translator, that is, mastery of the language translated from and, equally, of that into which the work is translated. As has been said in discussing these criteria:

If a deficiency be to be allowed in either, it is in the original; since if he be but master enough of the tongue of his author, as to be master of his sense, it is possible for him to express that sense with eloquence in his own, if he have a thorough command of that. But without the latter, he can never arrive at the useful and the delightful; without which reading is a penance and a fatigue. (Dryden, *Life of Lucian*, c.1696, pub. 1711)

Translation is always a reflection of its own time, for instance Richard le Gallien's translations of Hafiz into Swinburnian metre appear dated in the eyes of any modern reader, whereas some translations are timeless. Cary's Dante could not be done today, as the language into which he moved Dante has changed, but it nevertheless remains a classic, as does the (earlier) translation of Rabelais by the Scottish writer, Urquhart.

A modern, accessible 'translation' of Chaucer, that by Nevill Coghill, published by Penguin, made Chaucer available and comprehensible to a readership that could not understand Early Middle English. The same problem arises in respect of modern translations of the Bible that are often more accurate (e.g. instead of 'goodwill to all men', 'to all men of goodwill'), but fall short stylistically when compared with the Authorised Version of 1612. Yet the King James Bible, described as 'the only work of genius ever done by a committee' was contemporary with Shakespeare and thus coincides with a Golden Age of English letters, not just because writers proliferated but because the language was at the apex of its development, when even the common speech used by some of Shakespeare's characters was vigorous and eloquent, not stale and flat as it is today. The whole issue raises two questions. Can one translate English into English, or Turkish into Turkish? Secondly, is one justified in attempting such a translation when the language is decadent and may produce an effect the opposite of what the well-intentioned translator intends?

Given the neglect of Turkish literature, especially Ottoman, in the West as compared with the focus on the Arabic and Persian traditions, I see my role as an introducer as well as a translator. Any translation is an intermediary between author and reader, and this imposes a special responsibility towards both parties. The task of translators is formidable one, burdened as they are with this twofold responsibility. Perhaps the only competent party in this relation is the author, seldom still alive, who alone know the meaning of what is written.

In the context of Islamic hermeneutics the task of translators is more than usually formidable, for the author of the text on which they exercise their hermeneutical skill is no less than the God who created them, with all the concomitant limitations, and no one else knows the true meaning of the metaphorical (or allegorical) passages referred to in 3: 5–7, which might preclude both translation and interpretation since every translation of the Quran is simultaneously a *tafsir*, that is, an interpretive commentary on these and other verses in a book that has been aptly described as ‘a sea without shores’ (Bruns, 1992: 12). It has been remarked that the Qur’an is unique amongst scriptures in that it alone supplies rules for its own interpretation, whilst leaving readers to make their mind up which verses are literal and which allegorical, thereby constituting a challenge to future readers/translators. This represents a built-in safeguard against revelation in this case becoming ossified, as has happened so often in the history of religions. If al-Ghazali, from whom Bruns is quoting, believed that the Qur’an had no semantic boundaries, how could he be so audacious as to attempt the impossible in writing *Mishkat al-Anwar* (*The Niche for Lights*) in seeking to understand and convey the meaning of one of the most difficult passages in the Qur’an, that of 24: 35?

Al-Ghazali found a solution to his own hermeneutical plight by relying on mystical illumination for ultimate truth, which he may have invoked in writing *Mishkat al-Anwar*, having to his own satisfaction demonstrated the limitations of logic (*mantiq*) when applied to a text whose authorship is divine, whilst acknowledging how that which is obscure may be interpreted in the light of that which is plain (Bruns, 1992: 286), an approach whose limitations are also sufficiently obvious. As a spokesman for this neglected field of literary studies, I see myself in succession to such gifted translators as McCullum, who made available to an English-speaking public one of the classics of Turkish literature, the *Mevlid* (nativity hymn) composed by Suleiman Chelebi (1957) in the fourteenth century.

It is not easy to predict how the art of translation will develop in the future, but computerised linguistics, a newcomer to academe, must inevitably affect translation methodology in the future. This means that translation may become in some respects a return to textual translation, and translation a computer science, subject to scientific discipline. However, I think we have come a long way in the 'art' of translation and translators have developed their own professional opinions, which I hope will continue to influence the development of the field. As Greenall (2006) remarks:

Translation studies is a patchwork discipline, with theoretical contributions emerging from a wide range of different fields. From the point of view of this plurality, one can perceive two noticeable characteristics: firstly, the fields feeding into translation studies have done so mostly on a one-by-one basis (i.e. they have 'taken turns' at providing perspectives on the phenomenon of translation). And secondly, individual fields feeding into translation studies have had their own periods of domination. For instance, during large portions of the previous century, translation studies was dominated by a linguistic perspective, whereas recently, the field has seen a surge of approaches embracing a social and/or cultural perspective.

CHAPTER IV: Translations of Individual Poets

i. Quatrains of Mevlana Rumi

Parliamentarians are required to declare a vested interest and here I feel compelled to do likewise, for Rumi and I share same birthday, with this difference: he is world famous—UNESCO declared 2007 International Rumi Year—whereas I remain insignificant, still hoping for recognition.

Rumi, the greatest mystical poet in Islam, was born in Balkh in modern Afghanistan, but his family fled before the Mongol advance into Khorasan, settling eventually in Konya, then the capital of the Empire of the Lesser Seljuks, under the patronage of Sultan Kaykubad II. The Mevlevi Order, popularly known as the Whirling Dervishes and founded by his son, Sultan Walad, spread rapidly throughout Seljuk domains and latterly Ottoman. In fact, it was the Head of the Order who performed the ‘coronation’ ceremony on the succession of a new sultan to the Ottoman throne, travelling from Konya to gird him with the sword of Osman, founder of the Ottoman dynasty. It became the ‘establishment’ order under the Ottoman regime to which the judiciary belonged, in addition to numerous intellectuals, artists, poets and musicians. Reynold Nicholson’s monumental translation in five volumes laid the foundation of his fame in the West. My life parallels his in more than one way, not just our coincidental birthday but because, like him, I fled from an uncongenial, philistine regime that, had I stayed, would have cramped my creativity by embargoing my freedom of speech.

The rubai has been made familiar to Western readers by Edward Fitzgerald’s inspired paraphrase of Omar Khayyam, on school reading lists in the UK in the 1960s, introducing children to a culture and a form of imagery they might not otherwise have encountered:

Awake! for morning in the Bowl of Night
Has flung the stone that puts the stars to flight
And lo! the hunter of the East
Has caught the Sultan’s turret in a noose of light.

(Fitzgerald, 1859/1990, *The Rubai'yat of Omar Khayyam*)

As much as imagery, metaphor is important, and it is not always easy to account for Fitzgerald's popularity with Western audiences because his poems assumed a cultural propinquity or familiarity that may not always be present. Since not every European has been on a caravan on the Silk Road, readers may not know that the way to wake up the caravaners to resume the journey in the morning is to rattle a stone in a metal bowl. Although Fitzgerald's metaphor is sufficiently clear for a reader to get the meaning, it does not follow that all would grasp the metaphors even in these few lines: the turret they might assume is a minaret, for example, whereas the reference is to secular Islamic architecture, as the Sultan's palace is always located within a walled enclosure punctuated at intervals by guard towers (*buruj*) that the rays of dawn have picked out from the darkness. This acutely epitomises the translator's dilemma in rendering oriental verse for a Western audience, as many of the terms of reference are culturally specific, but Fitzgerald knew that what he was writing was not a translation but a paraphrase. This allowed a certain latitude, successful in the first figure of speech, less so in the second. He was writing for an audience thirsty for the romantic and exotic image of the East, with its sounds and colours so contrastive to a grey, industrialised London.

The quatrain form imposes on the poet a concision that entails compression of meaning. It also operates within a tradition in oriental poetry in which the poet deploys all the familiar imagery and tropes of Eastern verse: roses, gardens, nightingales, the moon, the face of the beloved and so on. The challenge to any poet attempting this difficult form is how to renovate the language whilst relying on familiar imagery. In using peculiarly oriental metaphors without accompanying exegesis, Fitzgerald is challenging a culturally myopic British readership to cross unfamiliar boundaries. However, Aristotle considered metaphor to be an innate capacity in man. This being the case, metaphor can to some extent serve as a bridge to understanding.

Rumi's *Masnawi* has been described as the Qur'an in verse. Like the Qur'an, it is didactic. Similarly, Rumi's quatrains express an acute moral sensibility imbued with a religious outlook. It is easy for a Western reader unfamiliar with Sufi poetry to misinterpret the erotic, frequently carnal imagery that such poetry often employs, such as what the Qur'an says in *Surat al-Baqara*. This is the book in which there are verses that are literal—they are the substance of the book—whilst others are metaphorical. Rumi extols the beauty of

his beloved, comparing her face to the radiance emitted by the sun, yet it is clear from the concluding lines of the quatrain that this is divine, not profane love:

Your face like the sun that shines out of the skies
Your beauty beyond telling,
While your love is inside me
It's strange it should be outside the soul and the world.

The quatrain closes with a reference to a familiar verse of the Qur'an that emphasises the transience of the physical world: 'All that is on the face of the earth will pass away, and, there remains [but] the face of your Lord':

A love-mad person can be singled out
Because he is riding the steed of love;
The real madman is he who knows Him.
We regard one who knows his Lord as a madman.

This refers to the characteristically Islamic phenomenon of the *majdhub*, someone who has been sent out of his mind by having been afforded a glimpse of the divine mysteries. This is a phenomenon not exclusive to Islam, because it also figures in Russian Orthodox tradition as the Holy Fool.

The aspirant who covets God's acceptance first needs to discipline himself, by recognising the impulses that come from the *nafs*, the carnal or appetitive soul. Rumi is quite explicit in his quatrain:

If you follow your ego and lust,
I tell you, you'll depart with empty hands.
But if you abandon lust, you'll see clearly
Why you came into this world, and where you will go.

Another familiar cliché in Islamic mystical poetry is comparing the state of intoxication of the person who experiences divine love with the intoxication of the drunkard, whence the familiar imagery of the bottle recurs in two quatrains:

Love came and broke his repentance like a bottle.
Who can put the shattered pieces together?
Only love can. How can we escape?
Where can we run to?

When she saw me intoxicated, she clapped her hands
And said, 'He broke his pledge and got drunk again'
Our pledge resembles a bottle-maker:
To make the bottle is always difficult but to break it is easy.

ii. *Anguish*, Necip Fazıl

My earliest model was Necip Fazıl, who supplied me with what this young poet most needed at a critical stage in his literary development. Another model ranking in importance in terms of his impact on me personally was Nazım Hikmet, to whom must also be added the example of Pound and the Imagist Movement. Fazıl's and Hikmet's influence lay not only in praxis but in the conceptual content of their work. By contrast with Nazım Hikmet's case, Necip Fazıl had hitherto lacked a translator adequate to the task. Somewhat presumptuously, I felt myself equal to the challenge this neglect afforded and set myself to render some of his work into English.

I am the compiler and part-translator of *Anguish*, by Necip Fazıl. Along with the communist poet Nazım Hikmet, Fazıl is a towering presence in modern Turkish poetry. The former was a poet of protest, and Fazıl also was a revolutionary, but here the resemblance ends: Fazıl is deeply influenced by mysticism and thus is addressing a different audience. When I was a teenager I found Fazıl's poems easier to memorise than Hikmet's, which may account for why his influence on me has been so deep and ongoing. Having been so dominant an influence I feel I owe him an introduction to an anglophone audience.

The title poem, 'Anguish', ironically subtitled 'Allegro', is written in quatrains rhyming ab ab. With its confident handling of metre and rhyme, it exhibits Fazıl's metrical skills combined with violent imagery:

Like a tiny teapot, the world convulsed,
Bearings burned out, void lay helter-skelter
Fact and fantasy alike were repulsed,
Wisdom and folly went out of kilter.

(‘Anguish’, by Necip Fazıl, trans. T. Halman, 2012)

‘The Legend of the Sakarya’ has been successfully translated into vivid, idiomatic English by Hamid Algar (born 1940), Professor Emeritus of Persian Studies at UCLA, specialising in Perso-Turkish history. It is done so well that readers sometimes feel they are reading the original; without any sacrifice in accuracy, Algar manages to convey the breathless pace of the original. This is the longest poem in the book and perhaps the one that most demands critical appraisal, not least because the river it celebrates played a significant part in the rise of the Ottoman Empire to world power status, on account of its strategic significance as a forward line of defence for the Byzantine Empire. It is even possible to contend that it was on its banks that the fate of Byzantium was decided; here, the Byzantines fought their long, losing battle with the Ottomans. Visibly identifying its historic significance is the number of ruined castles lining its western bank. No less important is the crucial role this waterway played in the Turkish War of Independence in the twentieth century. Awed by these scenes of blood and triumphant death, the poet yields to nostalgia and longing. The weight of the history it carries is almost too much for him to bear. Although the famous river still flows unimpeded, like the Nile and the Danube its days of glory are fled:

Should God wish, water can be folded and twisted
And Turkish history is being fastened on the back of the Sakarya.

Alas, Sakarya, is it to you this burden has fallen?
This cause is humble, this cause is an orphan, this cause is great!

How heavy a trail rests on your head, Sakarya;
How can a canary carry a thousand-headed eagle?
Now beat yourself in repentance, Sakarya, it’s what the time requires,
A time when old suns have fled to the Milky Way.

(trans. H. Algar, 2012)

The shining domes are the mosques built in the wake of the victorious armies of the Sons of Osman, but now the river that witnessed their deeds of valour is a pariah in a secular age in which these deeds no longer signify. Then, in an extraordinary metaphor in which the disconsolate poet and the river he empathises with become ‘dough [mixed] with tears’ that fate has kneaded with the claw of the scorpion, Fazil exhorts that beautiful water to ‘twist on’, whilst I go, with the Last Prophet as my guide!’ ending with the tremendous exhortation to awake and resume its role: ‘You have crawled too long on your face; on your feet, Sakarya!’

In contrast to the bravura of ‘Legend of the Sakarya’, elsewhere the poet uses homely metaphors like sidewalks and hotel rooms, but the tone and the purpose are the same, and the imagery no less violent as he trembles on the brink of paranoia in ‘Hotel Rooms’, with its use of a refrain every other line, that emphasises the banality of lonely death:

I am on the street, in the middle of a lonely street,
Walking, walking without looking behind.
In the dark arrow-stuck centre of the street
Am seeing a patient spectre lurking by me.

Dark skies are shut behind ashen clouds
Above, lightning is waiting for roofs;
Spirits, ogres are asleep, only two wanderers awake,
One is me, the other, vagabond sidewalks.

(‘Sidewalks’, trans. Murat Nemet-Nejat, 2012)

And the shuffling slippers tap secret things
On the dingy floors, on the dingy floors

In the naked walls throbs the pulse of pain
In the wounds of nails, in the wounds of nails

Hear the teeth of time gnaw the rotting wood
In the dusty lofts, in the dusty lofts

Weep for those who die without voice or friend
In hotel rooms, in hotel rooms

(‘Hotel Rooms’, trans. Bernard Lewis, 2012)

The undiluted pessimism of these lines reflects the poet's mood of despair, in stark contrast to the heroics once witnessed by the great river whose power to revive humanity he extols in his longest poem, an act of homage to heroic past. In that poem Fazil shows himself an unrepentant Romantic, with the typical romantic preoccupation with nature seen as reflecting human moods.

Both the images of banality and those of greatness are delivered with the technical mastery and energy of diction that compel the readers' admiration.

Anthologies

i. Istanbul Poems

One vivid memory surviving from of childhood is how my elders would enthuse over Istanbul, from which I gathered that this unique city constituted a historical bridge over which not just armies but ideas would pass in either direction, from East to West, and, latterly, from West to East. This accounts for how European influences—*vers libre*, surrealism, and so on—would infiltrate and ultimately dominate the literary scene in modern Turkey as it became progressively Westernised.

Usually Rome is referred to as the Eternal City. Whilst not disputing the accuracy of the designation, the term is perhaps equally applicable to Istanbul. Like Rome, Istanbul is layer upon layer of civilisations. History meets one at every street corner; small wonder that so many poets are obsessed with her! Many poets and poems have been inspired by the history and complexity. Just as in Sufism the mystical experience is described using the language of profane love, yet always contrasted with divine love, the poets address Istanbul hyperbolically as mistress, as girlfriend, as wife, with all the ambiguities such relationships involve. Istanbul is a demanding mistress whose favours are courted by many:

I fell in love with you when I saw you,
I can't forget you till the end of my life, Yakacik.

(‘Yakacik’, Mehmet Çınarlı, *Istanbul Poems*, 2011)

We may expect more eulogies addressed to Istanbul, since a start was made on recovery when she was designated European City of Culture for 2010. After a period when her beauties were obscured mosques, colleges and mausolea, neglected and hastening to decay, mosques are being

refurbished, finials on the domes regilt, *caravanserais* converted to new usage such as craft workshops or hotels, and the industrial sewer—once the ‘golden’ Horn—being cleansed. In places like Khodja Mustafa Pasha and the Booksellers Bazaar, never invaded by modernity, it is still possible to recapture something of the past of the peerless city recorded by Thomas Allom (1804–72), architect, artist, and topographical illustrator in engravings in the early nineteenth century. This was prior to the Tanzimat and the degradation of the Islamic environment due to an uncritical adulation of everything Western. That so much of this beauty was allowed to vanish accounts for the poet’s nostalgia. The consummation of the poet’s love affair comes when he sees the city in everything: ‘Istanbul, I touch you with a hundred thousand hands’.

My leaves are my eyes, and I am shocked at what I see.
I look at you, Istanbul, with a hundred thousand eyes
And my leaves beat, beat with a hundred thousand hearts,
I am a walnut tree in Gulhane Park.
You don’t know this and the police don’t either.

(‘The Walnut Tree’, Nazim Hikmet, 1 July 1957, *Istanbul Poems*, 2011)

Such is your vision of Istanbul, I think
If you stand before a postcard
And look with hungry longing

(‘Istanbul’, A. Kadir, *ibid.*)

What sort of water is this, what kind of city?
Istanbul’s in the bottle, Istanbul’s on the table.
When we walk she walks, when we stop she stops;
We were confused,
She’s on one side, I’m on the other, Istanbul in the middle,
Once you love, you’re in trouble.
Wherever you go, Istanbul is there.

(‘Istanbul’, Umit Yaşar Oğuzcan, *ibid.*)

ii. Ottoman Court Poetry

Poets belonged to royal houses that not only patronised literature but contributed with poems of their own composition. As an ambassador between cultures, even a self-appointed one, I see their work as charged with special significance by virtue of the high political role they played. Stylistically, their poetry falls into the ‘divan’ category and is consequently elitist.

Most modern Turkish translators were cut off from the golden age of Turkish letters by linguistic reforms introduced in 1928 and subsequently, not least the elimination of Persian and Arabic words from the Turkish lexicon and their substitution with anglicisms, and so on, that posed problems for the translator. These were difficulties that did not obtain in my own case, having had an approximation to a classical education, all which makes me feel better qualified than most to convey the meaning to a modern reader.

Never has the political misuse of history been better put than by George Orwell: ‘He who controls the present controls the past: he who controls the past controls the future’ (Orwell, 1980: 38). This proposition reminds me how historical fact can be twisted by a ruling elite to fit its political interests. Here it figures in a poem I wrote, reflecting on the propensity of our political class to adjust facts to a version of events, entitled ‘History’:

I am in front of demolished walls
Shaking the nights
Gathering the eyes of history
I am the one singled
To cultivate the well-tilled field
of exile

I am asked to feed
The magnetic north to empty words
We must know where we stand

(‘History’, Mevlut Ceylan, *Seasons from other Seeds*, 2011c)

The Ottomans were the superpower of the Middle Ages, and continued to be a major power until their gradual eclipse in the nineteenth century when the Empire became, in the Czar's phrase, 'the sick man of Europe'. The Ottoman Sultans were not only the protectors of the Islamic faith but the leaders of the global Muslim community. Paradoxically, the Ottoman Caliphate was at its most influential internationally at the nadir of its political decadence, when the repeated assault of imperialist west upon the Muslim world compelled other Muslim countries not ruled by the Ottomans to look to the Ottoman Empire for protection, as the last remaining military power.

Since this fortune fell upon us
Why aren't you content with
Your destiny? What's wrong?
You claim to be a pilgrim of the Two Sanctuaries
If that's so, why worldly greed and desires

(Adli Bayazid II, *The Sultan Poets*, 2011)

The Two Sanctuaries situated on the Arabian Peninsula are designated Mecca al-Mukarramah and Madinah al-Munawarah, that is, Mecca the Honoured and Madinah the Illumined. The Ottoman Sultans were not only Sultan but Caliph, signifying that they were not just political leaders but religious heads of all the Muslim community, claiming the allegiance of all Muslims worldwide.

Ghazi Osman Bey, the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, even in his capacity as a commander would express an aesthetic sensibility in his poem entitled 'Conquer Constantinople'. When we read the next line we see that, far from destroying Constantinople, he gave it a fresh lease of life as 'a rose garden' (*Gulistan*). The sword is not in this type of poetry, and the poets 'let the lyre speak'. In the theatre of war one of the most feared Ottoman Sultans, Selim the Grim, salutes the idea of beauty in its multiform expressions.

It is possible to argue that these poets, who were fierce warriors more famed for their sanguinary deeds than their verses, were hypocrites hoping to draw a veil over some of the more questionable aspects of their behaviour by invoking religion. It is not easy to

reconcile, for though the inquisitors of Spanish inquisitor Torquemada did not write poetry their literary contemporaries like St John of the Cross certainly did, which makes their silence on the fiery labours of inquisitions hard to explain, likewise Cervantes the greatest name in Spanish literature, applauding the expulsion of the Moriscoes in 1609 by Philip III. When we compare them with their latter-day successors in the realm of power politics, the Bushes and Obamas of this world, there is one noticeable difference: a decline in the importance that the public assigns the aesthetic, pointing to a decline of civilisation itself. When Obama's drones are killing innocent civilians, the slaughter is dismissed as 'collateral damage' in the clichéd jargon the media use to applaud such deeds, seeking to justify the unjustifiable.

The Ottoman poet also feels humbled in the presence of his beloved and begs for forgiveness:

Sometimes tears turn my face red
Because of the shame of my sins
My hope lies with no one but you
Forgive me, forgive your Selim!

(ibid.)

Jehangir Mustafa III expressed his burning indignation at injustice, at the same time deploring how some of his subjects stray from the right path:

This world is in ruins; don't think it can be put right
Wretched fortune gave the state to good-for-nothing people
None of the civil servants are all corrupt and villains
Our only hope remains in God's compassion and mercy.

(ibid.)

iii. Turkish Poets of the Balkans

Whenever I thought about the Balkans I would imagine wars, grief, heartache, separation, animosities between peoples. My ancestors came to Anatolia from Rumelia as part of the military units conscripted to fight Tamerlane. I suppose this remote connection qualifies

me to rank as an ‘honorary’ European! Istanbul is a bridge, not only between Asiatic and Rumelian Turkey but a between East and West, signifying cultural exchange and interchange no less than politico-military conflict.

As my mother tongue, Turkish served me also as a bridge with which to establish connections with Balkan culture and understand how Islam, as a universal religion, could flourish in a European environment, albeit with significant differences; for instance the great Bosnian poetess Umihana Cavidina (c. 1794–c. 1870), writing in her native tongue.

I am the compiler or translator of the poems anthologised (see *infra* Appendices C–F). I have chosen them because they represent the voice of persecution. The slow retreat of Ottoman power and contraction of its territory, particularly in consequence of the First Balkan War, left behind pockets of ethnic Turks saddled with an identity crisis never resolved, perhaps because it is insoluble. Expatriate poets were accustomed to going to Turkey for their education then returning, crossing religio-cultural frontiers as well as political, like any minority cut off from the motherland (e.g. the plight of the Sudetenlanders¹). This experience reinforces their sense of national identity. It is a cliché that nationalism is always stronger in frontier areas (cf. the Schleswig-Holstein² question). Anti-Turkish sentiment is at its strongest where countries such as Greece and Bulgaria share a frontier with Turkey.

The term ‘diaspora’ is inappropriate in this context. Ethnic Turks are people left stranded by the slow retreat of Ottoman power and the rise of local nationalism in the nineteenth century. Stranded Turks are seen as cultural, even political, fifth columnists to such a degree that even Bosnians, who are not Turkish, are called Turks by their Serb enemies. Similar considerations would apply in the case of Albanians and Kosovans, for example the substantial Albanian minority in Macedonia.

The anthology focuses on four areas of Rumelian Turkey: Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kosovo and Western Thrace. Under Ottoman dominion Turkish was the *lingua franca* in all these areas, which did not prevent the educated in any of the four countries from being able to

¹ Sudetenland: a Germanophone area, formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, later a Germanic enclave within Czechoslovakia.

² Schleswig-Holstein: a disputed area lying between Germany and Denmark.

write and speak other languages: Arabic, of course, but also Persian in addition to the local tongue, Bosnian, Albanian, and so on.

Particularly in poetry, the Persian influence is dominant. It is often remarked that in Turkish literature any Turkish words are in a minority. In poetry, the vocabulary is largely Persian; in prose, predominantly Arabic. Thus a cultured man in Bosnia, to take but one instance, would be quadrilingual, fluent not only in Bosnian but in Persian, Arabic and Turkish. Turkish Balkan poetry always tends toward the eclectic, testifying to the wide variety of cultural influences to which a poet born in Balkans was inevitably exposed.

In Persian culture, the New Year (Nauruz), that is, the Persian solar year, although a secular festival, is very important. Not only does one take the day off, but a family will picnic in the countryside amongst the freshly sprung flowers, communing with nature, having taken with them their samovar in order to spend the whole day savouring the joys of spring. Poems celebrating the arrival of springtime constitute an independent genre in Persian literature. This collection features no fewer than five examples, and Raif Kirkul's 'Instead of Greeting' is a noteworthy example of the genre:

She passed through the streets
She had intense green eyes
She looked at the mountains just once
And they were dressed in green
And the fields wore green as well

(‘Spring’, Iskender Muzbeg Sefikoglu, *Turkish Poets of the Balkans*, ed. Ceylan, 2012b)

The tree was embarrassed
To be over-dressed in green
The stork regretted it all
And returned to his red house
Winter handed in his resignation
Offering spring in his place.

(‘Instead of Greeting’, Raif Kirkul, *ibid.*)

The process by which the earth annually renews itself has always fascinated Persians; although the tradition antedates Islam, Muslims see it as a confirmation of the Qur'anic position whereby natural phenomena are tokens foreshadowing the resurrection. In *Spring Poems* the Macedonian poet Esad Bayram hails the rising of the sap. Essentially, these are all poems about transformation, changes in nature wrought by the changing of the seasons.

On an altogether different plane are poems about love, whose outcome is less certain than the arrival of spring. The Bulgarian poet Faik Ismail Arda expresses in several acerbic lines the disillusionment love can bring, ending on a note of cynicism. However, the same poet when writing 'Years Later', in an expression of nostalgia for lost love, expresses genuine grief at his loss:

and that is the reason
why we are here now
And one day we suddenly all fell in love
with the same girl
so we loved her and we loved her and then
we loved her again but nowadays
we are tired
we are tired of loving
for something happened
something unexpected—
our loved ones became the beloveds of others
And others became ours
One more time
You will leave me alone
Under that tree
By that fountain.

(‘Years Later’, Faik Ismail Arda, *ibid.*)

More often love brings pain than pleasure, as in Saran Sarakoglu's 'Waiting', where the poet waits for the beloved who fails to return. Yet another Bulgarian poet, Ibrahim Kamberoglu, after exploring the darkness of pessimism, takes a more optimistic view:

This is the final
Victory for the light
A single dot of light
Can undo
a whole vast darkness

(‘The Light’, Ibrahim Kanberoğlu, *Turkish Poets of the Balkans*, trans. M. Ceylan, 2012b: 31)

The same author, having experienced dictatorship at first hand, writes a fine poem of protest in *Saz*. ‘Saz’ has two meanings: besides being a folk instrument it means joy. The oppressors who have taken away his musical instrument have taken away his voice, his capacity for self-expression:

They broke my wings
They took away my saz
They stopped me talking
They stole my laugh
No one told me why

(‘Saz’, Ibrahim Kamberoğlu, *ibid.*: 30)

In ‘Free Child’, the Thracian poet Huseyin Alibabaoglu rejoices that his child will not grow up to experience the oppression he himself has known: children forced to adopt Bulgarian names; banning of the Turkish language in schools; preventing children from being circumcised. At the height of the persecution, many fled Bulgaria to seek refuge in Turkey, where they were put up in camps. The situation was aggravated by other factors such as the close affinity that Bulgarians feel for Russia, Turkey’s historical enemy. These people who had enjoyed autonomy under the *millet* system,³ with their own courts, schools and so on, proceeded to deny these rights to others.

³ Millet (Ar. milla), signifying ‘community’, has a specific legal connotation, indicating a small, faith-based community whose rights are protected by statute.

My child was born free
Without knowing of
The other children of the world
Then he will be surprised to see
Yellow-white-black
To hear of
Races-languages-religions
But the games of politics lack children's laughter
(‘Free Child’, Huseyin Alibabaoğlu, *ibid.*)

The city appears time and again in this anthology: Istanbul is a constant in Turkish verse because it is *sui generis*, unlike any other city in the world. This city without peer exceeds poets' capacity to describe or praise it. In ‘Forgive me, Istanbul’, Mustafa Mutlu, apostrophising the city, says:

You can criticize me
For not finding the right words
To do your beauty justice
So in the end I'm simply incapable
Of writing a poem
(‘Forgive me, Istanbul’, Mustafa Mutlu, *ibid.*)

But in a poem by Yahya Kemal, the sacred precinct of Khoja Mustafa Pasha near the land-walls of Byzantium is a metaphor for all the historical phases the city has witnessed:

Khodja Mustafa Pasha! Poor and distant Istanbul!
Since the conquest you're a devout believer, and needy,
Here live those who deem sorrow is pleasure

The meaning becomes apparent only when the reader knows that Khoja Mustafa Pasha, the shrine of Sunbul Effendi, whom childless mothers petition for release from infertility, was once a Byzantine church that only became a mosque after the Ottoman conquest:

I was with them all day in this lovely dream.
Our motherland and nation are inseparable twins.
Thus we alone have been seen, and have been heard.
The moral frame radiant for five centuries;
Death is near, so close.
Sun followed an April rain.
On such a day reality mingled with dreams.
Doomsday is on the scene, very near,
So near there's no dividing wall between,
One is a step away from the other,
Seeing the beloved beyond is certain
(‘Khoja Mustafa Pasha’, Yahya Kemal, *Istanbul Poem*, 2011)

The transformed building is a metaphor not only for urban but cultural and ideological renewal, the alien world made Turkish, a philosophy of blood and soil, according to which there exists a sacramental relationship between a place and the people who inhabit it, in this case, ever since 1453, when Fatih conquered Constantinople (‘the moral frame radiant for five centuries’). The same sense of location recurs in a poem in the ever-popular vernal genre, in Murtaza Busra’s poem:

Lokach in Spring
And Divanyolu
And Kuri Ibrahim too
Oh my dear friends,
My city was so beautiful!

(Murtaza Buşra, *Turkish Poets of the Balkans*, ed. Ceylan, 2012b)

Although, strictly speaking, these pockets of ethnic Turks are not colonies, they may suffer from the same complexes as do Americans and Australians whose own literary tradition is inferior to Britain's, that is to say, derivative and imitative. The Ottoman identity was essentially a religious one, embracing diverse races such as Slavs in Bosnia, Croatia and Sanjak, and Albanians in Albania, Kosova and Macedonia. Bosnian Muslims are falsely described as Turks to justify their persecution, the persecutors portraying them as invaders/outsiders/foreign conquerors (all pejorative terms calculated to excite hatred), whereas they are converts. The work anthologised in this collection exhibits the symptoms of the psychological shock people experience when finding themselves a persecuted minority when formerly they had been the majority. In 1886 the population of the Danubian Province, today called Bulgaria, was predominantly Muslim, as were Crete and Rhodes.

CHAPTER V: The Yunus Emre Institute, London

Although the purpose of Yunus Emre Centres is to explore routes toward cultural intercourse between diverse cultures that have developed along distinct historical lines, the strategy for the London Centre can only be properly understood if cited in the context of history. Historically, Europe has at times been open to extra-European influences. Eurocentricity is an ideological hangover from the Victorian era. Before the blight of Victorianism, Britain, indeed Europe, was not immune to the lure of the East. This manifested itself *inter alia* in sinophilia, which found plastic expression in the phenomenon known as chinoiserie. Paralleling the craze for all things Chinese (the *philosophes* thought of China as a land ruled by philosophers), there was the kindred phenomenon of Turcophilia. As Islam receded as a political threat, it progressively assumed the character of a cultural attraction. Turcophilia influenced diverse areas of activity: music, architecture, painting, garden design (accounting for the presence in English of Turkish loan-words, for instance kiosk, from *koshk*, also tulipomania), social habits (the practice of regular bathing), hygiene (Turkish, i.e. vapour baths), medicine (the introduction of inoculation) and even social mores (the coffeehouse).

It is commonly believed that the earliest instance of Turkish architecture in Britain was the ‘mosque’ designed by the royal architect, Chambers, in Kew Gardens in 1761, but before that the Hon. Charles Hamilton had erected a Janissary tent in his famous landscape garden at Painshill, Surrey. An elevation datable to the 1750s shows it to be ten years older than the mosque in Kew. The tent started a vogue that spread all over Europe, even to Venice and Sweden (the Hagar tent designed by Piper for the Swedish Royal Family). Another Janissary tent at Stourhead, Wiltshire, was described by Lybbe Powis in 1776; yet another was in Vauxhall Gardens in London, and another at West Wycombe (erected by Francis Dashwood, the founder of the Hell-fire Club). Most were ephemeral, but the brick core of the earliest one, Painshill, survived and provided a basis for a modern restoration unveiled by Prince Charles in 1995. This Janissary tent was complete with horsetails, realised in wire!

Less subject to change or demolition than architecture, many paintings attest to the popularity of Ottoman costume amongst the British upper classes. The eighteenth century saw a passion for clubs; all sorts proliferated and, just as the qualification for membership of the Dilettanti Club was having been to Italy, so the qualification for the membership of the Divan Club was having been to the Ottoman Empire. Ambassadors were eminently qualified for membership, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, whose husband was ambassador to the Sublime Porte, had her portrait painted *a la turque* (Finnegan, 2006). It is now in the National Portrait Gallery, where she is shown with her infant son Edward also garbed as a Turk. The artist must have been possessed of unusual prescience, for he was not to know that Edward would convert to Islam when he grew up. His mother's paintings of scenes in Turkey, now in a private collection, have figured on BBC television's *Antiques Roadshow* (2011). At West Wycombe may be found portraits of members of the Divan Club including El Faquir Dashwood Pasha, on his left the Sultana Wortley Montague and on his right Sultana Walcatonia (Sir Francis's half-sister), all three attired *a la turque* and with crescents incorporated in the design of the frames.

Nor was Ottoman fashion confined to Britain. The famous portraitist for portraying ladies of fashion as harem inmates was the Swiss artist, Liotard. Similarly in France, Charles van Loo portrayed Madame de Pompadour as an odalisque wearing *shalvar*⁴ in a painting now in the Hermitage in St Petersburg. Originally, the painting hung in Madame de Pompadour's Turkish room (*chambre a la turque*) in her chateau of Bellevue at Meudon, outside Paris, destroyed during the French Revolution. Unfortunately, none of these beguiling costumes has survived, but in one instance masculine costume does: Lord Byron was depicted in Albanian costume (portrait in the National Portrait Gallery) by Philips, and this costume is on display at the National Museum of Costume in Bath. (ibid., p. 12)

There is no record of Turkish music ever having influenced British music, but this may be due to the paucity of British composers; on the Continent it was different. Gluk, Hayden, Mozart and Beethoven all composed Mehter music;⁵ indeed, all European military music derives from Mehter. Frederick the Great's father was the first European monarch to introduce military music into Europe. At the start he attempted to do it on his own, but

⁴ Shalvar (Ar. & Turk. *shalwar*): baggy trousers worn by either sex.

⁵ Mehter: Although associated with the Ottomans (specifically the Janissary corps), Mehter (Turkish military music) dates from the time of the Seljuk dynasty.

when at a review in Postdam he saw the Ottoman ambassador splitting his sides with laughter, he took the hint and sent to Istanbul for Mehter musicians to come to Prussia and train the first military band in European history.

I should modestly like to see myself in the role of heir to that great tradition of Turcophilia, when the condition of admission to the Divan Club was to have lived or travelled in the Ottoman Empire, just as the condition of admission elsewhere was to have performed the Grand Tour, a sort of finishing school without which a nobleman's education was incomplete. The important thing was that the criterion in either case was an aesthetic one: either to have studied at first hand a dead culture (Graeco-Roman civilisation) or to have experienced a living one (Islam), the latter having the thrill of the exotic, unhappily now repressed and suppressed to such degree that practically no one knows about it. In sum, my present avocation is a challenge. Also perhaps, with less modesty, I should like to see the Yunus Emre Centre as a vehicle for its possible revival. The Centre is poised to resume the happy relations that Britain at one time enjoyed with Turkey, instead of the hostile image portrayed by people such as Gladstone, Bryce and Sykes; not merely to resume the former state of affairs but to build on the past in a way unimaginable to our predecessors. Today we enjoy singular advantages that not even the most optimistic representatives of the Georgian age could have dreamt of. They had theatre: we have film. They had concerts: today we have DVDs. The route to cultural cooperation pioneered by these distinguished representatives of British society and the dismantling of archaic stereotypes could be re-opened in a variety of ways inconceivable in their time, for example education and cultural partnership enterprises. Projects presently under consideration with the higher education institutions are as follows:

Academic Partnerships

- Masters degree in Turkish Cultural Studies
- Area Studies modules
- Social Sciences, and Humanities links
- Inter-cultural communication studies
- English for news media
- Work-related courses in English
- Certificate in Translation: English/Turkish.

Prospects for Bridge Building to Turcophone Communities in London

- Weekend courses in English to broaden audiences' engagement with cultural events
- Community Volunteer Translator courses
- Mentoring programmes
- Programmes for parents on school education
- Summer schools
- Links with Routes into Languages scheme

These proposals for collaborative work in London and internationally will require much preparatory research before they can be defined in detail, much less executed, but to date we have been able to arrange the following:

- Poetry competitions designed to encourage young talent
- Lectures by distinguished academics and experts of international repute
- Visits and talks by prominent English writers, e.g. former Poet Laureate Andrew Motion
- English and Turkish writers and joint seminars aiming at making contemporary Turkish writing accessible to the British public.

Other projects on the drawing board comprise:

- Cultural tours to site with Anglo-Turkish associations, e.g. Lord Leighton's House, the Burton Mausoleum, the National Costume Museum in Bath, the Janissary tent at Painshill, and Islamic Collections at the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum, both of which rejoice in extensive collections of Turkish art of the Ottoman period
- Creative writing courses under the supervision of teachers of creative writing at British colleges and universities
- Exchange programmes with Yunus Emre centres elsewhere, e.g. Sarajevo and Budapest
- Concerts of Ottoman classical music given by local and foreign ensembles.

À propos this last, the Centre has held two (the Buhurizade Itri Ensemble, and the Anton Pann Group from Rumania in collaboration with the Rumanian Cultural Centre). This aspect of our activities is one to which I attach particular importance inasmuch as music is

an international language. Of all the arts, music is the one most accessible to people of diverse nationalities, facilitating communication across cultural frontiers in a manner not possible for literature, although literature retains its importance as a vehicle for ideas.

A number of the themes we have explored to date I see as coming together in fruitful association in the context of ongoing cultural dialogue with myself, I like to think, as catalyst. It is a truism that a translator is an ambassador between cultures who interprets one culture in the language of another, thereby making the incomprehensible comprehensible, and the hitherto unarticulated articulate and thereby understood.

CHAPTER VI: Preferred Methodology:

Building Bridges

Creative writing, and poetry in particular, is methodology-free. ‘Burning the midnight oil’ is no guarantee of literary success. Creative writing, cannot—except for metre and rhyme—be reduced to a series of rules that ensures success. There are no rules on how to write a good poem whereas, in scholarship, research methods are imparted with proper methodology in which sometimes the author’s talent counts for less than his industry, laboriously acquired.

These considerations do not apply to activities such as anthologising, editing and literary criticism, fields to which I have devoted the most part of my energies. Therefore I propose to confine my remarks to these fields. In 1986 I founded Core Publications as a vehicle for, *inter alia*, translation, reviewing and critical assessment. Core Publications is bi-aspectual; its purpose was to have a journal, *Core*, featuring work by contemporary poets and writers, also to publish anthologies and work by aspiring writers. As an expatriate out of favour in my own country (due to military dictatorship and insensitive censorship), I chose English as a vehicle of expression that could simultaneously act as a bridge over which knowledge of the Turkish literary scene could pass to an Anglophone audiences.

Building bridges has always been central to the role I envisaged for myself in coming to the West. Turkey is itself a bridge, a geographical bridge linking Asia to Europe, over which ideas as well as armies formerly passed. It is, moreover, unique in modern Islamic experience as the only Muslim country successfully to have managed transition from dictatorship to democracy. The work of literary dissidents, subject in their own country to arbitrary censorship by military censors, takes on added significance which can, to some degree, be compared to the better-known cases of Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn. I have, therefore, both as editor and anthologist, given prominence to writers who are in authority’s bad books in their homeland and whose work is either banned or has received a hostile reception on the part of an Establishment press. To this end, translation has always been central to my purpose, perhaps even exceeding in volume, and certainly in importance, my own original work. Translation from modern Turkish and Ottoman languages poses a translator with certain problems, not least the fact that as an Altaic

tongue Turkish does not lend itself easily to translation. Sometimes adaption is better than literal rendering and may yield more aesthetically satisfactory results. We can refer in this connexion to Pound's *Propertius*, a classic case study of how to introduce one of the lesser-known Roman poets to people who otherwise would not have had the chance to familiarise themselves with his work.

Literary criticism in any recognisable sense is a phenomenon of recent growth in Turkish. There are in Turkey no schools of criticism like Leavis, seeking to find ways by which a work of literature may be evaluated using objective criteria. The place of objective criticism is taken by partisan criticism, Marxist and so on, by which a work of literature is evaluated on the bases of non-literary criteria.

One of my priorities as Director of the Yunus Emre Cultural Centre has been to share with the public knowledge of hitherto unexplored aspects of Ottoman/Turkish culture. This embraces the visual arts as well as literature and music. Music shares with the visual arts the advantage of being a universal language and is thus more accessible than literature, which inevitably loses in translation. To date, I have mounted exhibitions on Evliya Chelebi, the great travel writer of the seventeenth century; Mimar Sinan, admitted by all to be the foremost Muslim architect of all time; and another entitled 'Sharing the Sunlight', the object of which was to illustrate cultural diversity in Turkey. As a universal language, music is accessible to anyone with an ear, although the ear may have to be trained to pick up the more complex scales of Turkish music, appreciation of which presupposes an acquaintance with quarter-tones. I am currently organising concerts featuring composers from the golden age of Turkish music such as Hafiz Post, Buhurizade Mustafa Itri and Ibrahim Dede Effendi, including in our repertoire ethnic Armenian music from Turkey. Women composers featured in a concert given in March 2013.

In the course of building bridges to stimulate cultural dialogue, I have invited the former Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion, and former Children's Laureate, Michael Rosen, to talk about their work.

Workshops

To meet the goals we set ourselves, we have set up creative writing courses and juvenile poetry competitions with a panel of assessors and prizes for successful entrants. Each has been designed to nurture young talent amongst the Turkish expatriate community, cut off

from their roots and in danger of cultural oblivion, but whose work, if published, may serve as an exercise in East–West dialogue.

Agenda/Activity

At the Yunus Emre Centre I played an important part in getting Mary Young's book (2011) published, thereby adding something to French scholarship as well as English, and throwing a ray of light on an important phase of the French Revolution. In Mary's little book we learn something new about the rise of Napoleon, and we learn a great deal that is new about the end of the Reign of Terror and the death of the Robespierre brothers. The French Revolution in itself is seminal for much that happened across Europe and beyond, over the following hundred years.

I prefer to think of my role in publishing the book as purely a private one, in my capacity as a private citizen. Alternatively, I may be willing to see it as part of my role as Director of the Yunus Emre Centre.

CHAPTER VII:

i. Reflections on my Directorship

Potential and Prospects

In my opinion the Yunus Emre Centre has great potential to open up dialogue between the Islamic civilisation of the Near East and the civilisation of Europe in both its Christian and secular dimensions. Personally, I see my role as taking up where such illustrious predecessors as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and others left off, people whose contribution was obscured by the bitter dissonance of the First World War and its aftermath. Working in the tradition of inter-cultural dialogue pioneered by the turcophiles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I propose to initiate a programme of dialogue of cultures, laying the emphasis on activities that may result in a cross-fertilisation from which Anglo-Turkish understanding could evolve on more than one level. These include the social and political, for example exchange programmes for Turkish and British students, tours in Britain by Turkish musicians and ensembles, and so on, all executed under the aegis of prominent cultural institutions in Britain. We have a sound precedent in the success of the 'Sulaiman the Magnificent' exhibition at the British Museum. Included would be British universities that make provision for Turkish studies, learned societies like the Royal Asiatic Society, the BBC and the documentary television channels. I envisage a two-way traffic between these institutions and similar organisations in Ankara such as the Turkish Historical Society and the Turkish Language Society.

Nor does the Centre propose to confine its activities to Ottoman Culture, but to include the Seljuks and the Classical era (Hellenistic/Roman), besides which are plans to set up a board of advisors including such illustrious names as Dr Elisabeth Ettinghausen, an archaeologist whose work on Hellenistic sites in Anatolia is widely acclaimed. All are contingent on budgetary considerations (Ankara), but with partnership funding on joint projects this may be feasible. In our relations with Ankara a British connection would be extremely important in helping to overcome the inertia of bureaucracy. If we can devise a vision or the Centre's future calculated to impress the British Council we would have a fair chance of success. No less important is the question of sponsorship. Any major exhibition in London or Paris now boasts the logos and names of its sponsors. In this relation we

think not only of conventional sources of financing within Britain but of the possible involvement of Turkish banks and industry, particularly the former because they like to be seen as patrons of the arts and learning, financing the publication of encyclopaedias and monographs, a policy whereby they seek to furbish their public relations image.

ii. Reflections on Myself: Ego and Alter Ego

No story in Islamic literature resonates with me more than the scene of Firdausi's funeral. This scene epitomises my own predicament: substitute 'recognition' for 'patronage', and you have the story of my life. Throughout his life Firdausi searched for appreciative patronage, and he thought he had found it in Mahmud Ghaznavi, for whom he composed the epic of Persian literature, the *Shahnameh* (*Story of the Kings*). He was to have been paid two gold pieces for every couplet, totalling the not insignificant sum of 60,000 pieces of gold, but tardy recompense was to be his lot. The caravan carrying 60,000 gold pieces arrived at one gate in the city walls of Tus at the very moment when Firdausi's funeral was leaving the city by another.

The reason for the overdue recognition of the great poet's genius was the low esteem in which he was held at Mahmud's court, where he was considered a heretic. Similarly heretical views were attributed to me in the 1970s when first I began to publish, not on the grounds of religious unorthodoxy but political unorthodoxy, having grown up surrounded by walls daubed with anti-American graffiti like 'Yankees go home', referring to the presence of the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and its use of Turkish ports in defiance of Turkish public opinion.

It was a difficult time to be a Turk, especially a poet, particularly a dissident one in a political context intolerant of dissent, dominated by a repressive, pro-American régime on the familiar Middle Eastern model. Nevertheless, this precocious publication gave me the *entrée* to literary circles, salons, journals and their (frequently idiosyncratic) editors. In my troubled youth Ezra Pound's writing came as a revelation, likewise (the very different) Pablo Neruda, for both are prescriptive writers, and I had been following their prescriptions for years without having being conscious of it. In English the modernist movement may be said to have originated with the Imagists, whose manifesto I subscribed to unreservedly: a direct treatment of the thing, whether objective or subjective, and uncluttered diction a priority, the ideal representative of these criteria being T.E. Hulme.

There is perhaps no better account of what Imagism is/was about than the succinct description of the movement by Thom Gunn:

The idea behind Imagism, at its simplest, and it always remained pretty simple, was this: the poet sees an image and has a reaction to it; the poet presents the image as vividly as possible on the paper; then, without being told how to react, the reader reacts to the image in the same ways as the poet. It was a tiny movement with a tiny life-span which produced tiny poems; but it was to be the most influential poetic movement of the century, in subject matter confining itself to the sensory at the expense of the conceptual, in style emphasizing clarity and compression, and in form carrying with it the implicit necessity of free verse, which was still young and experimental at that time, by no means the drab norm it is nowadays. (Gunn, 2000: ix)

These were not the only people whom I sought to emulate. I would be less than generous were I to omit Nazim Hikmet, whom I have already mentioned, and the Spanish poet García Lorca (all in Turkish translation and all of whom contributed to helping me achieve an individual style). Slavish imitation was never my intention; rather, it was only when these influences had been transformed through a complex assimilation process involving personal, political and social contexts that they became decisive in enabling me to find an individual voice.

In addition, Eliot's work drew my attention to the Metaphysicals, notably Donne, whose startlingly original imagery was a major source of inspiration, showing me how to forge a style open to influence but unmistakably my own. Also influential was William Blake, whose words and images demonstrated how personal pain could be transformed into universal pain, making poet and reader feel no longer alone. Such poets made me think how fine a line divides the poet of the oppressed from the mystic, as one moves from the personal to the universal.

Lastly, an encounter with Japanese poetry, specifically Haiku with its emphasis on brevity, compression of meaning and formal concision (a sort of oriental imagism), provided me with a fresh locus: how to convey complexity clearly, simply and effectively, something that requires the skills of an alchemist!

By means of this retrospective, compelling me to reread my own work, I have come to appreciate even more the importance of these very disparate influences in forging an individual style. In pursuit of a style recognisably mine I was painfully conscious of my own inadequacies, and how long it takes to devise a style that cannot be mistaken for another's. Decisive in this development toward maturity has been my encounter with other cultures, either directly or vicariously, but always different from the one into which I was born. A cosmopolitan city such as London exposes an expatriate to a wide variety of influences that, linked to experience of personal hardship, enabled me to forge a poetic manner that, I think, is uniquely mine.

Influences range from slavish imitation to assimilation. They can also be conscious or unconscious, the former leaning toward imitation. Further, they can be direct or indirect. Unconsciously, I would seem to have assimilated surrealism via the *oeuvre* of one of its foremost exponents in Turkey, Sezai Karakoç, who at one time came strongly under the influence of French Surrealists such as Breton:

The sea sucks at the calm luminosity of your heart
And lies burning in the white darkness
On the iodine-smelling playgrounds of loneliness
I am something of a fairy-tale at that moment
A spasm of fever that comes and goes

(Sezai Karakoç, trans. Murat Nemet-Nejat)

No matter how thorough the degree of assimilation, I can still detect here and there in my own work echoes and traces of a movement whose impact was not limited to Europe but extending even to the periphery:

I am the broken bones
of the faces on reserved spaces
remaking them endlessly

(‘Psalms’, Mevlut Ceylan, *Seasons from other Seeds*, 2011c)

I hope to acquire skills in Haiku that shall enable me to address themes not found in traditional Haiku, like politics, or, to quote myself as part of a process of self-evaluation:

No one knows
How many rivers
Meet in my mind

(Mevlut Ceylan, *ibid.*)

In my career as an inactive activist, a dissenter who never made it to prison, my frustrations overflowed in verse. Therefore, in attempting a retrospective, I find it impossible to separate the political from the autobiographical or the autobiographical from the incidental, and therefore the significant from the trivial. In attempting to reconcile different aspects of one and the same reality I would sometimes resort to paradox:

I am in a perplexed darkness
Illuminating hearts and minds

(‘Thunder and Lightning’, Mevlut Ceylan, 2010)

Here the ‘heart and minds’ image is drawn from the clichéd language of political discourse. In a longer poem, ‘Psalms’, I used other clichés drawn from the same hypocritical stock of hackneyed phraseology to make a political point:

Leave me alone
keep to yourself your human rights
your judgment and sentences
martian friends, you are the architects
Of the mass grave under my feet
Oh brother of every death that clings and wakes
To my body

I know no mystical cure for nightmares
I must carry horizons in front of my very eyes
printing with my every step on earth
The marching alphabet of love and struggle

(‘Psalms’, Mevlut Ceylan, 1993)

Since we were not allowed to reflect on matters which in the Establishment’s view do not concern us, I sought to empathise with certain figures drawn from scripture. Particularly significant is the poem I chose for the most sensitive part of any collection, the first page:

i know the proper names
of things
i know how to greet
the people of light

this is what i call living
rustling leaves
chanting branches
flowers of every kind

this is an eternal
happiness
i knew no enemies
i knew not to use
his name in vain

i cannot
remember

what it was like to be
where i was
the heavens were in my palm
drifting towards many directions

(‘I am Adam’, Mevlut Ceylan, 2005)

For, according to the Qur'an, God first taught Adam 'the names [of things]', thereby creating language and in so doing made revelation [of the divine will] possible, likewise the limitless horizons that revelation opens up. As the first man, Adam was simultaneously the first prophet, but the sequence of prophesy continued as one of God's chosen vehicles was Abraham:

i am abraham, the idol-breaker, trapped in his thoughts
and witnessing the early death of day and night

i am abraham, i, the faithful traveller
though neither mathematician nor philosopher

who multiplies, adds, subtracts
and divides everything at hand

i am abraham, whose mind is an observatory
holding hostage, one day the sun and next day the moon

i am abraham the outcast of the temple
father of the faithful, idols turn into dust at my gaze

my prayers command the wind and the fire
yeti am the guest in the rose garden

('Abraham', Mevlut Ceylan, 2004)

Iqbal, in his (six) Lectures on the Revivification of Religious Thought in Islam, makes the often overlooked point that the Qur'anic vision is essentially anti-Aristotelian, instancing the emphasis the Qur'an lays on small, apparently insignificant things, like a flower or an insects, especially a bee or a spider, the last of which lends its name to an entire chapter of the Qur'an (Surat al Anqabut). Here I am referring to an incident in the *Sirah* (biography of the Prophet), the famous occasion during the Flight when the Meccans were searching for him and he sought refuge in a cave, where a spider obligingly wove a web across the entrance. When the Meccans saw it they concluded the Prophet could not be inside. Of course, the spider was acting under divine guidance, so I wrote:

busy designing
a door for a cave
where i hid
my love

(‘I am the Spider’, Mevlut Ceylan, 2005)

Someday I hope to be inspired by bees, according to the Qur’an (Surat an Nahl) recipients of divine inspiration, but at more length and in a way reminiscent of Virgil’s *Georgics*, besides Iqbal’s reminder that the vision of the Qur’an is anti-Aristotelian. By this he meant that the Qur’anic revelation rejects Aristotle’s view of an anthropocentric universe in favour of a holistic one, lending support to the view entertained by some that Islam started to deteriorate from the moment Muslim scholars substituted Aristotle for Plato.

Practically every reflective individual has at some time experienced what St John of the Cross calls ‘the dark night of the soul’. It was out of the experience of such night that I wrote:

Listen you must bury me before you go away
stony tireless shadows like dead coffins on the wall
leeching on life’s endless desires

I am the earth yet I am haunted
by rotten waters
the surrenders to the dark

but I used to have seasons
blossoming from other seeds
Why then must a shroud be my horizon
why I will forge me a new season

Oh I must rise from anvils
strong as a blade of grass
strong as the gathering lava of patience
slowly raiding the shores of light
and love’s unspelt thresholds

(‘Threshold’, Mevlut Ceylan, *Core Magazine*, Vol.3/4, 1990)

Coming to the need for reconciliation with my circumstances were I ever to attain my goal of interpreting the East to the West and in so doing interpreting myself to myself, perhaps the precondition of being able to write poetry, I wrote:

In a roof-less house
a child was born
Side by side with hatred and love

he grew solidly
He slept little
turned away quickly
from the carved the stones of man

The colour of his thoughts
and waves of his sounds
appeared in a blurred picture
He is mature now

(‘The Birth’, Mevlut Ceylan, *Seasons from other Seeds*, 2011c)

Even coming within sight of the Promised Land in the poem of that title (2010), even in the throes of self-doubt, it has never occurred to me to doubt the efficacy of the printed word:

we are all here
by the gate of the border
built on the sand

today the border is closed
it was closed yesterday
it will be closed tomorrow

faces old, faces young parade
run and run around the border walls
we all stand still on the line

a line drawn on the sand
by the desert wind with metallic hand

today we stand here alone
against the wall
we stood alone yesterday
we shall not be alone tomorrow

(Mevlut Ceylan, *Against the Wall*, 2012a)

Only the hope of some improvement in the condition of my unhappy land gave me the strength to keep writing, whilst I committed my secret thoughts to paper in my poems.

iii. Reflections on Translation: A Retrospective

Poets I have anthologised whose birthdays fall between 1900 and 1960 represent their generations, but have also influenced other generations of poets. I felt they deserved inclusion so as to introduce them to an English-speaking public unaware of the significance of their contribution.

My translation work was another important step in my formation, because it brought me into touch with the likes of Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian poet, and James Joyce, the Irish poet. The painful political experiences of these men threatened their very identities but helped them transform into powerful identities not only for themselves but for their peoples and for all who feel oppressed or threatened by the engulfing of their cultures on the part of a more powerful force. Perhaps more than original composition, it is my translation activity that brought me recognition on an international level. Reviewing *Istanbul Poems*, Talat Halman wrote:

Collectively, the poems are a paean to the ‘City of Cities’. The poets sing her praises the way minstrels used to celebrate a beautiful beloved. In the

past few decades, however, social realism has taken up themes of poverty and degradation, suffering and injustice in Istanbul. Some of the poems in the Ceylan volume shun maudlin passions as well as ideological commitment. They capture the city's historical personality, human dramas, and mythical dimensions. *Istanbul Poems* is a collection as fascinating, frustrating, exotic, and creative as Istanbul itself.

In any anthology of translations, the problem of selection is compounded by translation. None of these poets had an English-speaking audience in mind when they wrote, because Turkish readership is assumed to be familiar with the terms of reference. Thus translation entails crossing cultural boundaries. Terms of reference that impede a reader's response, if miscomprehended, may lead to a false understanding of the poet's meaning.

In an anthology, the criteria of selection are crucial, and an anthology stands or falls by the criteria employed; Yeats's *Modern English Verse* was a publishing fiasco, whereas Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* is a classic that has stood the test of time. Here my criterion has been to emphasise the work of poets who fit within the Turkish classical tradition but whose voice is unmistakeably of our time (cf. Eliot's 'to purify the dialect of the tribe', 1963).

A translator inevitably speaks through personae who are seldom or never his own, although he may suffer (or rejoice) with them vicariously. In this section of my work I emerge from these personae, or what Yeats calls 'masks', to appear naked and vulnerable in the first person.

My own experience offers certain parallels with those of others no less unfortunate in the course of a thankless struggle to express themselves, albeit perhaps for different reasons, both having known what it is like to live under repressive regimes, both seeing ourselves as the voice of the oppressed, yet within different situations that might call for a different kind of response.

I am an expatriate who chose to live in an alien environment; they did not choose their present plight, victims of circumstances over which they had no control and circumstances in some respects worse than my own, for at least I was never forced to adopt a non-Turkish name and thereby deprive my posterity of identity. It is not only a question of having courage in adversity, but also in obscurity: a writer writes in order to be read. There is

more than one form of censorship; others, no less insidious, include neglect and the conspiracy of silence. Russian dissidents such as Pasternak were accorded maximum publicity abroad, whilst the voice of Turkish dissidence was ignored. Lacking even the consolation of being recognised in one's own country, no Turkish dissident was ever awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, the honour of which goes to authors whose outlook has been aptly described as 'mid-Atlantic'. Ethnic Turks were the victims of a falsified history, a history reinterpreted by the new rulers, for instance calling Bosnians 'Turks' when they were in reality indigenous converts; although stigmatised as Turks, in 1989 the then Turkish Government declined to come to their aid.

In oriental society, where sycophancy yields the highest rewards, two reactions are possible: either one becomes paranoid or emerges enriched by the experience, endowed with a capacity to empathise with fellow unfortunates that might not have developed under less adverse conditions. My appointment as Director of the Yunus Emre Centre in a city with a significant expatriate Turkish population offered scope for me to exercise unexpected talents as a philanthropist, encouraging promise where I saw it in young people, sometimes even before they themselves. Moreover, here in London where Gladstone operated, ably seconded by people like Lord Bryce and the late Arnold Toynbee, there was no lack of stereotypes calling to be demolished. As Director, I saw myself acting in a dual capacity: as demolisher of stereotypes but also as a pioneer, seeking to create positive images to replace the negative ones bequeathed us by politicians and sycophantic hangers-on.

Resumé

Re-visiting and re-experiencing my achievement as poet, as translator and as Director (2010–14) of a cultural centre, I am conscious how much all these activities owe to love and a devotion to an ideal, transcending personal limitations. This attitude in return gave me an intellectual freedom, besides maintaining a degree of personal integrity perhaps wanting in more conformist writers whose elastic consciences enabled them to compromise with the regime in power and continue writing within the constraints of a dictatorial system.

In my experience, connecting with other cultures through poetry reduces or dilutes social biases and prejudices of the particular, because they are framed in a way that allows universal connections to be made. My experience of translating poetry and other literary texts into English and Turkish has helped me extend understanding beyond geophysical borders to a more in-depth perception of human diversity.

One who speaks only one language is one person, but one who speaks two is two persons, as the Turkish proverb has it. I think this has allowed me to go beyond mere empathy, inasmuch as it has enabled me to enter into the minds of others. Since arriving in the UK I have always sought to educate others or re-educate myself. In order to achieve my dream I have worked in a somewhat desultory manner at odd jobs, kept unsocial hours and invested my slender resources in the re-education referred to. In retrospect I realise that, had I not embarked on translation and thereby communed with the thought processes of established writers, I could easily have become demoralised, chewing the bitter fruit of exile in solitude, becoming ever more demoralised with the passage of time, as has been the fate of so many exiles.

This recent experience of critique has afforded me an opportunity to re-assess my past in a more critical light than might otherwise have been the case, both with regard to myself and other people. In future my intention is to devote more time to my own poetry; also I intend to be more selective with the texts I render into English, laying emphasis on other genres. Dramas, short stories, even novellas will be the focus of my interest whilst I try to maintain the highest possible standards of translation accuracy, eschewing a loose rendering of the meaning for a more precise mode of discourse. I propose to devote the remainder of my life mainly to verse composition, thereby reversing the career of Virgil who intended to devote the rest of his life to the study of philosophy, had he but lived. Always, whether in translation or original composition, I will aim at producing a quality product and less ‘ideological commitment’, as Halman pointed out when reviewing my *Istanbul Poems* anthology.

I always had an inquisitive mind, questioning what was happening around me and in the world at large. Particularly from having been an ‘organic poet’ in the first place, this encounter with this critical reflexive form of research has shown me how to write, not only in a more coherent manner but in which I can see the influences on myself of events and people and in turn my impact on them. Undertaking to work on this critique for a doctoral

award compelled me to order my thoughts logically and rely less on (a supposedly infallible) instinct. It required me to be explicit about what I have been doing for the most part intuitively. It has taught me that intuition is not instinct or a reactive response but rather the response of the integrated knowledge and experiences of one's life and work through a form of ongoing internal learning. That internal process can, however, also make us miss things and it is only when we make them explicit that we see gaps. The work of great critics like G. Lowes-Dickenson opened up for me a new world, showing just how much I was missing in a poem through lacking the criteria of analysis that a disciplined academic mind brings to the task. It also demonstrated that literary criticism is a discipline no less rigorous than, say, the study of particle physics. I, who approached poetry by reacting to it in what I thought was instinctive, now see that there are other approaches no less viable, and I hope with this newfound and unsought modesty I may bring to a literary text deeper insights to the existence of that to which I had formerly been blind.

I do not hesitate to identify the influences I find myself under, likewise my aspirations as a poet and a professional. Therefore I know how to organise my opinions better, and I think this experience has enhanced my stature and given me the confidence to air my own opinions. As far as I know, few poets will admit to being poets or publicly declare themselves one. Almost alone amongst well-known figures, Joseph Brodsky gave his profession as 'poet'. Now, after reorganising my thought processes in a more disciplined manner, I feel I can make the claim publicly or take part in literary gatherings that I usually avoid, preferring to share my poems with a close circle of friends. Now I am more willing to take part in poetry readings, as I did recently when I was invited to conduct a poetry workshop in Brussels. To an invitation that I would previously have been too shy to reply, I accepted without hesitation.

My Relationship With Authority

I grew up learning that there were at least two versions of history (in my case, this of course means Turkish history): the official and the unofficial. The official version, which we received at school, in textbooks and in the press, contradicted the unofficial version in several ways in terms of facts, figures and attribution of blame, but also in interpretation of events and motivations during the Republican era. In the unofficial version, told through the narratives of living and dead participants on all sides and outside observers, layers are revealed and questions raised about the official, sanitised version of the victor that cloaks

the tragic and horrible consequences for the people caught up in such civil wars and occupations and new beginnings. Turkey is not unique or even new in this respect. Athenians rewrote the history of the region after their victory over the Persians in the closing years of the fifth century BCE. Being Turkish and a young man, the Republican era was the critical incident colouring my own understanding about trust and authority.

As that young man, I met witnesses who were directly affected by the war that led to the devastation of whole communities during the early 1920s. I learned that, to a war-weary people, hunger is a more potent threat than enemies themselves. I believe I could see the fear still in their eyes, as if they could never again trust peace: they feared for their lives and their livestock as if still struggling in the final chaos thrown up by the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–22 and before the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1922, when the authorities were able to begin to restore some semblance of law and order. Vast numbers of people were constantly on the move. I learned that tens of thousands of people were missing in action, were sick, classified as deserters or prisoners of war, and some unofficial accounts said that half a million were disabled. This contradiction between what is an official and what is an unofficial version, as told me by survivors of those events, made me more conscious of the complexities of history and my political surroundings, and the need to question what is considered the authorised version, to question the ascribed, stolen or assumed authority of commentators on anything.

During my teenage years, most of my elders who had fought during the First World War and in the Independence War were still alive. At home I was surrounded by glorious tales of the Ottoman Empire, a superpower in its heyday. Ottoman Turkey was built by a handful of nomadic Turkoman tribes; in the span of only two hundred years, they became masters of a sprawling empire, from the Balkans, the gateway of Europe, to North Africa and the Middle East. This lasted longer than the Roman Empire. The power and passion with which these tales were told exuded the quality of fantasy and it felt like being in the Arabian 'A Thousand and One Nights'. I still remember the visceral sadness I felt on hearing the stories about the Arab revolt and the atrocities committed by Arabs who rose up against Ottoman rule during the Great War.

Many people who have been through and continue to go through such times find their behaviour altered. Not only did this era give me some personal enlightenment about notions of truth and how far human beings can go in the name of beliefs, ideologies and

pursuit of dominance. It also showed how everyday routines in the aftermath can be both state- and self-censored—going to the market, wearing particular clothes or speaking freely among friends.

In my case, whenever I visit Ankara even now I avoid going to the Ulucanlar (Great Souls) neighbourhood, where gallows were set up daily during the early years of the Republic and dead bodies exhibited for days to frighten the residents of the city. This is not a new way of dealing with the opposition. Such actions have a 'rich' Ottoman past and can be identified with Ottoman-Turco statecraft, which used violence frequently to maintain its unfettered and personalised absolutism. However, regardless of which country and for what reason, I find this form of punishment abhorrent and inhumane. In the case of Turkey, my country, I feel a sense of shame at a personal level in my own country's historical capabilities in physical violence and psychological repression.

History is either written by the victor or can be seen as a multi-perspective lens on the acts and attitudes of human beings in territorial and ideological conflicts, which go well beyond the boundaries of what is expected of 'civilised', indeed humane, behaviour. Like pain, it seems that what we may be trying to do in art, poetry and music is to transform the pain into something else so that we can make meaning out of having to endure it. Pain and loss are universal experiences. The irony is that that which can unite us across difference, because no one wants it, is what is used to divide, dominate and repress us by instilling the fear of it.

Thus, history—personal recollections and the 'official' story—formed an important part of my early upbringing and forcing me to confront uncomfortable realisations. Perhaps even now I support any protests against negative historical events that best reflect or express my feelings against injustices. I often reference my thoughts with history, even though I consciously live in the present. I am alive to the presence of a thing and to its history, both at the same time. This may, arguably, put me at odds with my intrinsic self. A walking and talking contradiction? I am unsure. However, what I am sure of is that this doctoral study I have embarked on has helped me to appreciate history as part of, and not instead of, time present and time future.

As a child, stories I heard from real life affected me deeply and I did not know what to do with the feelings they evoked in me. Their fear was my fear; their horror, mine. This is what children do: absorb everything, whole, like a lump of food, without the means to

break it down, rationalise it and objectify it and evacuate its harm. I found an outlet later in writing poetry, which became for me a way to make sense of trauma by externalising it in words that did not belong to any political party but spoke to what is universally shared, the human suffering that arises from the confusions and contradictions of war.

I wrote the following poem when I was a teenager to share and air the voice of downtrodden people of my country and those beyond Turkey's borders.

in our country
death stars
with the name of a loved one

we are dragged across squares
on our hands
and knees

a friend
raises his gun
the darkness is vast around here

then women
gather their heroes
in their arms

Mevlut Ceylan, Edebiyat Dergisi, July, 1978

My generation was the product of the fear that I had witnessed as a child. The value system and the way of life embodying a certain set of beliefs that had preceded the conflict were now discarded for a 'new way', causing deep-seated change and confusion for communities that had built their systems on beliefs passed down for centuries. Modern England to this day still experiences the traces of discord of previous centuries' persecution of belief systems that also had endured for centuries, one example being that the royal head of state can never be from the Catholic religion.

In my formative years in Turkey, poetry came to my rescue again as if it were a lifebuoy, keeping me afloat in a vast sea of insecurity. I was not and, I would argue, am still not a violent person, but I always raise my voice against injustice, with a deep sense of rage burning inside me. I have found that poetry is the means I use against all forms of oppression. But it also gave me a sense of identity. When a leading literary journal, (*Edebiyat Dergisi*, July 1976) published my first poems while I was still a teenager, it helped me to stand tall, to feel I could do something useful with what had seem to be so much waste.

Mountains are the measure of sadness
The moon reflects on my forehead
In the nomad tents the women sing laments
As they untie the darkness

The houses are full of wilderness
Instead of wind sorrow blows
Like a train disturbing the mountains
In the crowded evening death is long and slow

Mountains are the symbol of my rebellion

Poetry is the eternal sea of the heart
And so are your eyes
My love

Mevlut Ceylan, in *Edebiyat Dergisi*, May, 1978

My interest in language started when I was in secondary school. My choice of studying English was an investment in my future. In fact, thinking back, at the moment I saw political graffiti daubed in English on the walls of Ankara I wondered what part I might play, for good or ill, through accessing this universal form of expression.

Writing in my own tongue isolated my thoughts and put me into a linguistic straitjacket. My vernacular was limiting me. I was studying classical Arabic at the time, but English was more international. It would be a ticket to new horizons and fresh hopes.

With my English still limited and with help from an English dictionary, I translated into Turkish a poem from Dau Aldulpha's *Pygmies Direction* book. The poet was African. I found I wanted to communicate with others outside of my immediate cultural realm. Thus, at this early stage of my life, I realised how important it is to have the support of intellectuals outside of Turkey's borders. In those days Turkey was ruled by an uncompromising elite with an uncompromising direction. Although we had an elected government that seemed to the rest of the world to be liberating and progressive, internally it was a different story, especially for those who valued their religious beliefs and traditions. I always felt its policies were heavy-handed, inhibiting my choice of identity and belonging. This only served to sharpen my feeling, as a politicised teenager, and fuelled my growing turmoil.

In addition to my poetry, translation also appealed to my need to reach out and build bridges to the outside world, hoping that this bridge would meet, first, with the exploited peoples of the world and their exploiters and, second, help me towards self-discovery. Even as a teenager I could feel that having a common understanding with others as fellow human beings would bring me into a better relationship not just with them but with myself.

My home was not a castle where I could retreat whenever I needed to. In the late 1970s, police harassment, constant surveillance and the fear of detention meant that I was always on the move. This was not a normal or healthy life for a teenager. I think due partly to the uncomfortable situation I was in, and partly to my yearning for a land of dreams and hope, I had to leave the country. Even though I was working as a civil servant and had a reasonable salary, my mind was not at peace with itself and my country seemed to be sliding towards a future in which I felt I could never belong or, indeed, had not been invited to.

When my father and three of my close friends bid farewell to me as I started on my journey to England, it was behind an iron-grilled wall on a cold grey Ankara morning in 1979, and I felt I was free at last. However, for the first time in my life I was not sure if I was doing the right thing. When I took my seat on the plane I felt I was in a tunnel and the sound of the engine was like a machine gun that kept firing. I was on my way to freedom, I could change the world, but I also felt deep sadness and regret.

When the plane landed I felt as light as a feather, but as heavy as a dead weight. My doubts redoubled when I was detained and questioned by immigration officers. It dawned on me that my sense of being in a free land was misconceived. Detention, in-depth questioning and suspicion were not my understanding of freedom. Was it a mistake to come to England? I was yet to find out which London I had landed in. During the early to mid-1980s, London had mass unemployment and a small but highly politicised Turkish-speaking community, mainly asylum seekers making their way abroad after the 1980 military coup. By the late 1980s to the mid-90s London was hosting an avalanche of migrations from Turkey.

Dreams tossed and tossed

At the port of a foreign land

And turned into

Withered poppies

(Mevlut Ceylan, *Against the Wall*, 2012a)

I found myself confronting gloomy weather in London, where I was unable to tell the direction: which way did the sun rise and which way did it set? Time passed and I realised that the topic of the weather, in a few simple phrases, was an essential opening to any conversation with the indigenous population. Writing poetry kept me sane, kept me linked to dealing with reality and helped me not to let myself be turned over to disappointment, disillusion and cynicism.

on a wet december morning
I received a salvo of insults
from teenagers who sat on the wall

‘hey, you bloody foreigner’
the cry was in a language
that I was not versed in

knew of ‘blood’ and ‘foreign’
but the marriage of both
did not make sense

‘go home’ they howled
knew of ‘go’ and ‘home’
just left home i thought

wondering where to go next
the boys fell off the wall
they were in one piece

i was red all over

Mevlut Ceylan, from ‘Divan of Separation’, unpublished

The authorities and events in Turkey pushed me, like many others, to search for hope of a different future. I do not believe for a moment in the public relations portrayals of different ideological camps, whether from state authorities or ideological authorities. Someone's traitor is another person's hero. Even the most humane and selfless movements can turn into weapons of destruction in the fight for being right. Even although I would classify myself and many others who left their country into those who wished a better future for all, not just the few, I knew forcing that such movement in the end would be the same as any paradigm seeking dominance. People would die, people would suffer. To avoid disillusion and despair, the way forward was less easy, slower and less dramatic, requiring time, open education, freedom of speech supported by safe legislation and public institutions formed to care for society. I had to realise that I could only be a small cog and might not be alive to witness the results of taking such a position.

London woke me up from my hopeful dreams to realise an opportunity to achieve a reality that was irrepressible. As an individual I felt freer to express myself here. Now I had the opportunity to be a deliverer of my country's verse, my country, in which people felt hopeless and helpless and needed my help. Therefore, learning English was a must for me. I was out of 'the vase':

it's believed that snow
doesn't fall
on moonlit nights
afraid of darkness

it's believed that fear
whitens the skin
and eyes leave behind
a depthless well

snow kept in a vase
is white
and colour-blind

(Mevlut Ceylan, 'Against the Wall', 2012a)

The news of a *coup d'état* in Turkey (12 September 1980) had made me feel, once again, that my dreams were shattered. Again. Now I had thoughts of my fellow countrymen in khaki uniforms, which I had always resented. They evoked earlier images and stories of purges, exiles, unsolved murders and people in tears.

On the other hand, what made me feel at home in London was that one can talk to someone in a civilised manner who does not share your views. It would not result in violence or a quiet ushering to a place of permanent darkness and isolation. I began to appreciate the conditions that allow people to agree to disagree in safety. I felt that this was a route to achieve a way of peaceful co-existence.

I had to work hard and learn the language quickly so that I could start building cultural bridges from London to Turkey.

I never gave up writing poetry, bearing in mind that the Turkey I knew could contribute to a global literary journal, with my poetry and translations from other cultures at the epicentre. To me, London was the centre of the cultures of the world. I did not have to travel to India or Africa to meet people or find a book of poetry and writings of other genres. I found myself in the middle of political rallies in London, shouting loud and proud about the injustices that I had felt oppressed various historically, politically, socially and culturally marginalised peoples and groups. I met dissident poets and writers from mostly war-torn countries of the world or from the countries where imperialist legacies still linger on. These developments took place alongside trying to gain my economic self-sufficiency in London, but I was driven by passion and a need to succeed. As my comprehension of the language improved I started to translate poems of dissident poets from Third World Countries into Turkish. Poetry in translation made me feel I was part of the global community. René Char, the French poet, says: 'That which comes into the world to leave the world undisturbed, deserves neither our respect nor our attention' (1987: 1). By now I believed that the pen is mightier than the sword, and that words and poetry can kindle fire in the mind. The world can change.

During the mid-eighties, Feyyaz Fergar, the Turkish poet and short story writer, and I decided to bring out a literary journal, *Core*, an international poetry magazine. In our manifesto-like editorial we wrote as follows: 'Poets are the conscience of our imagination. Their job is to erect new beacons, not to uphold guttering candles'. To erect new beacons, to achieve this journey of hopeful change, I saw that translation was the vehicle we had to

harness. The journal focused on Turkish literature, introducing new voices from Turkey and around the world, and also publishing the works of internationally well-known writers and poets such as Allen Ginsberg and LeRoi Jones (aka Amiri Baraka). The first issue of the journal came out in 1987 and is still talked about today in Turkey's literary circles and regarded with respect. It was the first time outside Turkey that a literary journal had been published that gave space to poets belonging to different political camps.

I am the only Turkish translator to have translated the poems of poets from different ideological groups. This helped to establish healthy relationships with all groups, regardless of their world view. Over the years, I can say that I have acted as a voluntary cultural ambassador of Turkey; in fact, I think I can also say that it was because of my commitment to promoting Turkish culture that I was appointed as the Director of the Yunus Emre Institute in London.

Thus, I think it was the power of poetry that made things happen for me as a poet and translator all these years later, introducing me to a new realm and a new dimension.

Through working on this research into my own works I realised that I had changed my own writing style a few years ago. I reflected on why this had happened and the tensions that may have been present that might have influenced this. My role at the Yunus Emre Centre was one of cultural ambassador and, like any ambassador, I have been answerable to the country and the government by which I have been engaged to represent. It carries considerable responsibility, and one's own views and thoughts are secondary to being the voice of one's country in another land. I think the need always to be aware of speaking clearly and diplomatically so that there could be no misunderstanding between cultures somehow transferred into my writing, constraining my creativity and hiding myself in the brevity of a haiku style. My position thus influenced my approach to my own writing, in which I felt I was obliged to keep a balance between my creativity and the politics of authority. In truth I found this intellectually exhausting.

At the beginning of 2014 I was abruptly removed from my position without being given any reason, and was sent to Bucharest, Romania. Many leading intellectuals and academics in the UK raised their voices publicly against this move, stating that they had appreciated the bridges I had been building across our different cultures. I felt I had been betrayed in some way and I did not know why or by whom.

I
the knives are out
since I fell from grace

words
twisting

from the throne
like serpents

that sit now
on my breast

i'm still the brave knight
honouring the loyalties

in a barbed-wire room
made silent

i embrace my tomorrows

Mevlut Ceylan, from 'Divan of Separation', unpublished

I felt deeply touched by the generosity and cordial friendship displayed by my supporters, who included prominent academics, poets, translators and other literary people. One aspects of this whole affair that pleased me was the chance it gave me to meet and get to know so many good-hearted people, even though I did not necessarily share all my supporters' beliefs or political viewpoints. This knowledge alone helped restore my trust in people. Here I would like to share a letter written for the broadsheet newspapers:

We are writing to express our surprise and dismay to the Turkish government at the abrupt departure of Mevlut Ceylan from his role as Director of the Yunus Emre Centre in London. Since his appointment Mevlut Ceylan has achieved considerable success in bringing Turkish culture to a wide range of the British public through his events, courses, exhibitions and total commitment to cultural exchange as the facilitator

of understanding between diverse peoples. Mevlut Ceylan is also a highly respected poet and translator of poems. As a poet his works have enlightened the role of the poet in society through the ages and hits the contemporary note in relation to the challenges of the young in our societies today. As a translator he has worked tirelessly to translate and publish Turkish poetry that would otherwise never have reached the English speaking world. He has also translated poems from a range of cultures into Turkish. He has worked with academics to achieve knowledge exchange at higher education level being instrumental in setting up cooperation and partnerships between UK and Turkish higher education institutes. He will be sorely missed and his government should be proud of his significant achievements. He is a most fitting exponent of the values of Turkey's great poet, Yunus Emre, after whom the cultural centres are named.

A single word can brighten the face
Of one who knows the value of words?
Ripened in silence, a single word
acquires a great energy for work.
War is cut short by a word,
and a word heals the wounds,
and there's a word that changes
poison into butter and honey

Yunus Emre, 1989, *The Drop That Became the Sea: Lyric Poems of Yunus Emre*, trans.
Kabir Helminski and Refik Algan, p. 28

Nine months after I was sent into effective professional exile, I discovered that my organising of poetry recital sessions at the Centre was one of the factors contributing to my dismissal. Perhaps this is illustrative of the power of poetry to intimidate authority in the way seen in Turkey, and why this small aspect of my work was deemed suspect. The problem, as seen by the cultural authorities, was twofold: my initiative in this area was seen as insubordinate; and the use of English as well as Turkish works and Turkish poetry in translation transgressed the narrow, official view of the function of the Centre. This exile came at a moment when I thought I was safe from harassment by the authorities. I know now that, if you are a creative person, you remain vulnerable to being made an outcast and others will always regard you as a threat to their position. Some of the poets with whom I feel most affiliated, Ovid, Neruda, Samih Al Qasim and Mahmoud Darwish, also openly challenged the authorities of their time.

My relationship and difficulty with power and authority led me to observe the world of children: none more so than my own. Children can travel from one extreme to the other: life is either good or bad— for them, there is no grey area in between. I find their world enchanting. It is the world we find described in fairy tales. I have written poems for my children and others alongside them. By using the voice of my own inner child I hope I can contribute to building more bridges between the child and the adult. The future will be theirs, after all, and they may not invite us if we have failed to leave them only wars and dystopias. I found that children belong to the world of pure imagination and creativity, which eventually is ruined by our adult impositions; it is challenging for children today when adult impositions have an ease of access into child's mind in an unprecedented way and unprotective way. But in early childhood I believe the child carries no burden of anxiety and stress, so feels at one with the universe and in its innate feeling of humanity. This is Adam and Eve before their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Within a child there is no end of innocence; a wondrous world resides, resulting in feelings of freedom.

I was in heaven
Before I ended up
Here

To be with you
If you wish
I can show you
The way

(Mevlut Ceylan, 'Good Friday', 2011a)

During my time as director of the London Yunus Emre Centre, I carried on writing poems but undertook less translation. This was partly because I felt I had translated enough samples of the works of others and was now neglecting my own work. My new role as advisor at the Yunus Emre Centre will give me more time to focus on my own writing. During the time that I have been pursuing my doctorate, thinking and re-thinking the goals I set myself all those years ago, I have made a new resolution: I still would like to translate but this time I will chose the poems carefully, putting the quality of the work first and not personal ideological commitment.

I will continue to write and translate for children. I think the innocence and natural creativity of a child, in a world of social chaos, is a precious jewel to keep shining and

impressing upon others. Simone de Beauvoir commented that, 'Adults are only children in bigger bodies'. I hope we can all re-establish a link to the child in us all.

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit,
not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His
might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as he loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

'On Children', Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, 1980: 20

Probably the most important lesson I have learned from this programme is to look at my inner self more critically. Thus, if I am on the right inner path, my outer self will be positive, too. This is the way to inner peace.

Keep Searching

*overwhelming relief gives way to self-doubt;
what I thought an end was but a beginning*

What I see
In a looking-glass
Is not what I saw
Drawn in moon light

What matters *sententia* I forge
my tongue and my mind
Into time's tunnel
Mounted many worlds on my shoulders

Distances have no bearing
I understand
My heart is the finest
Reference point for

'keep digging le meas'*

** from a note sent to me by Seamus Heaney.*

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Appendices

Appendix A: Original Work

Appendix B: Translation

Appendix C: Critical Comment: A selection

Appendix D: Yunus Emre Centres: An antecedent?

APPENDIX A: Original Work

Some samples of my published works that do not feature in the main thesis.

The Sage

to mad

He rests his eyes and sets sail
the Long March

In a world of conflict
where he composes peace

'I am here' he howls at Gramsci
because 'You are there'!

He stands tall

Divan of Separation

I
the knives are out
since I fell from grace

words
twisting

from the throne
like serpents

that sit now
on my breast

i'm still the brave knight
honouring the loyalties

in a barbed-wire room
made silent

i embrace my tomorrows

II

water flows into
the caves of my eyes

then races out
into my palms

water cold, cool
swirls into the heart

curls and whirls
in and out

III

solitude in thoughts
tracking questions
in a shanty town

the sun opens
its door
to heavens

i cannot touch
the sky

i see

cannot chase

the airplanes

i see

cannot listen to

the birds

in exile

IV

my chest is fertile land

where stories are told

where roaring clouds

settle

she-loves-me petals

tell stories

V

on a wet december morning

I received a salvo of insults

from teenagers who sat on the wall

‘hey, you bloody foreigner’

the cry was in a language

that I was not versed in

knew of ‘blood’ and ‘foreign’

but the marriage of both

did not make sense

‘go home’ they howled

knew of 'go' and 'home'
just left home i thought

wondering where to go next
the boys fell off the wall
they were in one piece

i was red all over

VI
the walls have no ears
but a black-spot

the walls have no ears
but a lined-up audience

the walls have no ears
but sear my sight

the walls have no ears
but lost memories

VII
seven seas sob seven times
when man-cub weeps in his dream

stallions canter through
the tunnels of many tales

to defend their prairies
with the sound of horse-laughter

VIII

dream within dreams
shared at table
with a telling breath

that searches and laughs
too many mouths
inside a dream to handle

he stands up he's firm
and circles his fist in the air
'my dad was in my dream'

all dreams are mine, mine alone
i am the dream
i told you

my dad is my dream

IX

If every drop
of rain

is carried down
by an angel

what hordes
of exhausted angels
there must be !

X

head and shoulders
knees and toes
rolling

rolling
from right to left
from left to right

head and shoulders
knees and toes
rolling together
up and down

in the garden of eden

XI

I cannot love you
more than mum

I cannot love her
more than you

I'll love you half each
that's fair

XII

Scorching earth
deluge of rivers
on the move

panzers advance
in and out
of narrow streets

'little generals'
ambushed,
defiant

their screams turn
into hymns
and battalions
of carnations

APPENDIX B: Translation

Some examples of my translation activities, featuring poems that do not appear in the text. Original work and translations are presented in parallel columns for the purpose of the comparison, relieving the reader of the task of locating and identifying the originals.

Whom the Eyes Have Seen

Gözlerim Kimi Gördüler

Whom the Eyes Have Seen

odalarda oturdum

I sat in rooms

odaları kapladım

and became one with them

sokaklara çıktım

I went out into the streets

okakları doldurdum

and the streets flowed into my veins

görünen her şey ben oldum

I changed into visible objects

ve her şey beni gören göz oldu

and the objects into an eye that keeps watching me

ve ben görünmez oldum

Yet I am not visible

(Asaf Halet Celebi, 1907–58)

from *Broken Language*, trans. from the Turkish by Mevlut Ceylan

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Istanbul

(Ümit Yaşar Oğuzcan, 1926–84)

İstanbul

Istanbul

Evin içinde bir oda, odada İstanbul
Odanın içinde bir ayna, aynada İstanbul

A room in the house, in the room Istanbul
A mirror in the room, in the mirror Istanbul.

Adam sigarasını yaktı bir İstanbul dumanı
Kadın çantasını açu, çantada İstanbul

A man lit his cigarette; Istanbul smoked,
A woman opened her bag and found Istanbul inside.

Çocuk bir olta atmıştı denize, gördüm
Çekmeğe başladı, oltada İstanbul

I saw the child cast his fishing line into the sea,
He started to pull it up, Istanbul on the hook.

Bu ne biçim su, bu nasıl şehir
Şişede İstanbul, masada İstanbul

What sort of water is this, what kind of city?
Istanbul in the bottle, Istanbul on the table.

Yürüsek yürüyor, dursak duruyor, şaşırdık
Bir yanda o, bir yanda ben, ortada İstanbul

Whether we walk or stop it is there; it's confusing.
She's on one side, I'm on the other, Istanbul
between us.

İnsan bir kere sevmeye görsün, anladım
Nereye gidersen git, orada İstanbul.

Once you love, you're in trouble.
Wherever you go, Istanbul is there.

from *Istanbul Poems*, trans. from the Turkish by Mevlut Ceylan

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Turkish Lullabies

| | |
|--|--|
| Meyvasız ağaçların dibine de, Oturulmaz da kuzum nen, nen, nen, Nen! Şu çektiğim kara yazılar, Evlatsızlık yüzüner kuzum, nen, Nen, nen! | I can't sit under Fruitless trees, my love. Close your eyes; Go to sleep, my dove. All my sufferings bear no child, my love. Go to sleep; sleep, my dove. |
| Yüksek odalara attım postumu Bilemedim düşmanımı dostumu, Benim yavrum bana küstü mü? | I have stayed in so many places. I don't know who are my friends or foes. My baby, are you cross with me? |
| Yüce dağ başında bir kuzu meler, Kuzunun meleyişi bağrımı deler! Ninni kuzum ninni! | A lamb is bleating far off on high ground; It pierces through to my heart, that sound. Lullaby, my little lamb, lullaby! |

From *Traditional Turkish Lullabies*, trans. from the Turkish by Mevlut Ceylan

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World

Dünya

World

Dünya büyük
Ben kücüğüm

The world is big
I'm small

Koyümüzde
Kocaman
Bir çınar ağacı var

in our village
there is a huge
plane tree

Çınarın yanında
Çağlayarak akan
Bir nehir

near the plane tree
a river flows
like a song

Nehirde
Büyük şelale
Ve balıklar

the river has
big waterfalls
and many fishes

Dünya büyük
Daha sayısız köy
O kadar cınar
O kadar nehir
Ve kimbilir
Ne kadar balık var

the world is so big
who knows
how many more villages there are
who can count all the plane trees
all the rivers
all the fishes

(Cahit Zarifoglu, 1940–87)

from *Child Songs* by Cahit Zarifoglu, trans. from the Turkish by Mevlut Ceylan

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APPENDIX C:

Critical Comment: A selection

A poet's work should speak for itself, but sometimes critics find different qualities in one's work, and I subjoin some samples of their criticism.

These Turkish poems have a wonderful simplicity as well as they are rooted in tradition and yet their voices are distinctly modern—they speak to us in a direct way. Many thanks to Mevlut Ceylan for his very accessible translations.

(Debjani Chatterjee, OBE, poet/translator, from blurb)

Under the Same Sky, featuring Turkish Voices from Western Thrace, gives poetry lovers exquisite lyrics and their excellent English versions. As usual Mevlut Ceylan has performed yeoman's work in presenting poetic voices representing Turkish aesthetic tastes. This collection is a joy to read.

(Talat Halman, MBE, poet/scholar/translator, from blurb)

this minimal selection is tantalizingly effective, thanks in considerable measure to Mevlut Ceylan's strong translations.

(Talat Halman, *World Literature Today*, 1997, 71: 452)

Collectively, the poems are a paean to the 'City of Cities'. The poets sing her praises as the minstrels used to celebrate a beautiful beloved. In the past few decades, however, social realism has taken up themes of poverty and degradation, suffering and injustice in Istanbul. Some of the poems in the Ceylan volume shun maudlin passions as well as ideological commitment. They capture the city's

historical personality, human dramas, and mythical dimensions. *Istanbul Poems* is a collection as fascinating, frustrating, exotic, and creative as Istanbul itself.

(Talat Halman, *World Literature Today*, 1997, 71: 645)

What a marvellous collection! Your choice of language precisely and beautifully expresses your combination of mysticism and revolutionary fervour.

(Helen Goodway, poet/editor, on *Against the Wall*, personal communication, 2012)

Your poetry is beautiful and reminds me of the Latin American poet Pablo Neruda.

(Christopher van Wyk, children's author/novelist/poet, 1985, personal communication)

Your poems are tightly and economically written.

(Peter Mortimer, editor, 1987, personal communication)

Mevlut Ceylan's translations have always been 'carried-across' with an assured confidence that enables us to trust that the 'objective co-relative' of the poem is still there; he is an accomplished poet himself and we know that whatever metaphors and images he presents to us will have same heartbeat in English as they did in Turkish.

(Dave Nash, writer/poet, from *The Book of Poems*, Erdem Bayazit)

These poems (some translations) stay faithful to a tradition rooted eastwards and close to the core human grief and helplessness. Their brevity and extraordinary imagery illuminate the focus of each poem so that the collection is full of memorable lines.

(Judy Gahagan, poet/editor/translator, *Seasons from Other Seeds*, M. Ceylan, cover notes)

APPENDIX D:

Yunus Emre Centres: An antecedent?

The British Council was not the first in the field of promoting inter-cultural dialogue by establishing cultural centres in foreign capital. They were anticipated in this regard by the Turkish Republic in 1942 when the Turkish Government was invited to establish such a centre in London which, its obvious political motivation notwithstanding, offers interesting parallels with my own activity as Director of the Yunus Emre Centre.

The People's House, London

The Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre in London is not the first cultural centre set up outside Turkey; long before, there was the People's House, also in London. This forgotten episode in the history of Anglo-Turkish relations deserves to be better known.

After the Great War there followed the War of Independence, and the cost of both kept mounting exponentially, depleting the State coffers. The new republic was under the control of people whose outlook was secular, and conflict with adherents of the ancient régime ensued, further contributing to post-war anarchy. The mindset of the older generation could not be altered, so re-education focused on youth. The aim was to teach and promote Atatürk's principles and to seek public support for the reforms, to conduct research on cultural roots, often of dubious authenticity (e.g. the Sun theory; promotion of Hittite culture), to assemble people who shared the same ideals and, most importantly, to create an atmosphere of cohesion within the country. For all these purposes People's Houses were set up and financed by the State. They were at the forefront of organising courses and events on literature, arts, drama, rural development and almost all areas where the state felt its ideology open to challenge.

People's Houses opened in 17 Turkish cities on February, 1932; by 1940, additional branches operated in rural contexts; these branches were known as People's Rooms. Although the People's Houses and People's Rooms project was financed by the state, in reality it functioned as an extension of the ruling Republican People's Party (CHP). When

the multi-party system was introduced, the People's Houses project became a bone of contention between the Democratic Party (DP) and the CHP, now in opposition. The project was scrapped in 1951, and the assets of 4,322 People's Houses and People's Rooms were reutilised.

When a People's House was opened in London the initiative did not come from the Turkish side but from the British. In 1939, a group of aid workers came to Erzincan in Turkey from London to help earthquake victims. General Sir Wyndham Deedes, who accompanied the group, visited People's Houses and, impressed by their performance and commitment, on his return wrote a letter to the CHP stating that the reforms taking place in Turkey were not known in Britain; moreover, in Turkey people were unaware of British culture and way of life. In his letter, Deedes suggested opening an exemplary People's House in London and, hoping that such a venture would improve relationships between the two countries, further noted in his letter that the British Council and other associations might be able to lend support. In his reply, Refik Saydam, the Turkish Prime Minister, gave his full consent and backing to Deedes' proposal. With the same objectives in mind, the British Council opened in Turkey in 1940.

The People's House in London opened its doors two years later. Anthony Eden and several ministers were present at the opening ceremony. The objectives were to introduce Turkey and Turkish culture to the British public, to stimulate cultural contact between the two countries and to operate as a centre for Turkish citizens domiciled in Britain. The People's House was very active during the war years, 1942 and 1945. It organised Turkish language classes, conferences, talks and film-shows designed to promote awareness of Turkish culture. The People's House board of trustees comprised the Turkish Ambassador, the Chairman of the British Council, General Wyndham Deedes, the Turkish Trade Attaché and the First Secretary. When the British Council ceased financing the project, the British members no longer featured on the board. Since the British took the initiative, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that what the British had in mind was drawing Turkey into the British sphere of influence during the critical years of the war, if possible to get her to intervene, using the People's House as an extension to propaganda. In their communications the Embassy advocated limiting the activities of the Centre to teaching Turkish and English, and avoiding entanglement in politics.

Rusen Esref Unaydin, the Ambassador and Chairman of the People's House, suggested that the following topics be covered in lectures organised by the People's House:

- Ataturk's principles
- Constitution, health and education in Turkey
- Women in Turkish society
- Tourism, agriculture and mining.

The proposed topics were to be delivered by qualified Turkish academics and the texts of the talks to be sent from Turkey to ensure the maintenance of standards.

When we study the reports prepared about the People's Houses, we can see that some of these recommendations have retained their validity to this day. It was suggested that the Ambassador be made an Honorary Chairman of the House; that the House be given a free hand in organising its affairs; someone intellectually competent be appointed Chairman of the House; and the British be again involved in the decision-making process.

Seventy years later, the British Council is once again working in tandem with the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centre, having signed a partnership agreement for mutual collaboration. This time it seems that the partnership is between equals. In my opinion, it is too early to pass judgment five years down the line, and the relationship between the two institutions needs to be explored in detail.